

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to express my utter dismay and disappointment at the recent actions of Health Minister Nicola Roxon. As you are aware, Ms Roxon recently presented draft legislation relating to the registration of health professionals in Australia, which will come into effect from July 2010. As part of this legislation, independent midwives will lose their registration and their right to work with women outside hospital settings, which will make homebirth illegal. On top of this, families who attempt to homebirth with a midwife can be fined \$30,000 and the midwife could be jailed.

The crux of the issue is that currently independent midwives do not have access to professional indemnity insurance, and as part of this new legislation, all practitioners must have this insurance to be registered in their field. The Labor Government is well aware of what this means for homebirth, and has done absolutely nothing to assist midwives and their clientele, despite the fact that over 50% of responses to the recent Maternity Services Review advocated for more accessible homebirth services.

The right to choose how and where to birth is vital to the wellbeing of mothers and babies in this country. Women who desire an elective cesarean section are able to make this decision, women who wish to have particular pain relief are able to access this, but yet women who choose to birth with trained and expert caregivers in their own homes are going to be forced into hospitals or to birth without any trained professionals to assist them.

This is despite the overwhelming evidence that points to the safety of homebirth. A recent Dutch study involving over 500,000 women showed that homebirth was at least as safe as birthing in a hospital. The UK, France, Holland and most of Scandinavia all have high rates of home births, and offer wide access to corresponding care, community based homebirth programs and offer subsidies to families who birth at home, as they free up hospital resources for the sick.

Our league of unsung independent midwives should not be overlooked. They work seemingly tirelessly, on call day and night, dedicated to their clients, casting their wise, watchful gaze over the laboring woman, exuding calm and holding the sacred space of mother and child as they meet over that first breath of new life. The service they provide to mothers, is not just an amazing and divine birth experience that the hospital system is UTTERLY unable to compete with, but a wholistic continuity of care of both body and soul before during and well after birth. Children born into so much compassion and caring surely have the greatest start to life our society can offer!

I urge you to consider this issue and stand up for the rights of all childbearing women in this country. Choosing how and where to birth our babies should be an absolute right in Australia.

Kind Regards,  
Julie Konda