

Hello,

I am the mother of a 17 year old child born at home in 1992. I had not anticipated that I would go down some 'radical' birthing track when I conceived, but my experience of mainstream obstetrics, and my introduction to a homebirth midwife left me utterly illuminated that homebirth was the right choice for me. I feel so absolutely mortified at the prospect that homebirth might become illegal for the women who have an instinct for this gentle, bold and empowering choice. I reveled in literature from Europe and abroad where homebirth is considered 'normal'. As normal in fact, as getting pregnant.

I am extremely concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these extraordinary midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for our mothers and babies, opposes international trends in the 'gold standard' of maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With ridiculously high intervention rates in hospital, many women are fearful to birth their babes in hospitals, and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home.

If it became illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes the practice of unattended birth, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth.

I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in the unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an embarrassingly farcical situation in a contemporary democracy.

In the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am unaware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth. It makes me laugh first and then cry in shame at this outrageous, antiquated proposal within my own country.

It's vital that all Australian women are be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give choose to birth, and all midwives must be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Homebirth is an undisputed human right,

Yours sincerely,

Tess Schofield.