

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health
Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and
two related bills

I come from a long line of Home Birthing, I was born as a home birth, my
mother and her 2 sisters were all homebirths, and 4 of my cousins all had
the privilege of being born at home in a comfortable warm safe
environment.

I gave birth to my daughter, Isabella 7 years ago at my home with 2
midwives to care for me. The whole process was conducted very safely and
extremely professionally. I was booked into hospital, had an ambulance
booked just in case and was cared for very carefully.

It is a womans MOST NATURAL RIGHT to choose where and how she gives birth
to her child. We may as well live in a dictatorship if this simple
little choice for women is taken from them!

I am 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 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 mothers and babies, bucks international trends in
maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy
of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist
maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes 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 this practice, 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 unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely

Carly Black