

Dear Senator.

My name is Kristie Tatton and I am a birthing mother. My first experience of birth was in a hospital with strangers touching me, prodding me, telling me my body was failing, inadequate, distressing my baby. Eventually cut her out via cesarean section while I hemorrhaged critically. After 3 units of blood and a lot of issues, we were released into the wide world. 3 days later my cesarean burst with two massive abscesses that had previously been dismissed by the attending OBGYN.

Since that day in 2005 I have dreamed of having a home birth with an independent midwife. Where my concerns will be listened to, not fobbed off because I am "Just the Pregnant Woman" who does not hold a medical degree. I have fantasised about being nurtured in my own home, surrounded by love, rather than the clinical nature of linoleum floors and the lingering smell of disinfectant. I have prayed that I will be able to give birth and be treated like a woman who going through a momentous rite of passage, rather than a piece of meat who is there to try out new procedures. But the proposed changes to the Health Legislation could put an end to those dreams

The currently 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 one of the subjects of an Inquiry by the committee of Community Affairs concerns me greatly.

I find it wonderful that the bill expands the role of midwives and the provision of maternity services, but I find it disheartening and deplorable that it excludes midwives attending births at home. This effectively renders Homebirth with an Independent (not linked to a hospital) midwife illegal. Under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (due to be implemented in 2010), any midwife attending a woman at home who cannot obtain insurance will be breaking the law. Many states make it a criminal act to for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth. The new 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,
Kristie Tatton