

Dear Senator Moore

I'm writing to express my hope that homebirth will be a choice supported in the funding and indemnity arrangements currently being considered. I support the right of other women to choose to birth in a hospital or birth centre, but my right to birth at home will not be supported should these bills be passed as they currently stand. Taking away what I see as a woman's human right to birth where she chooses simply because only a minority makes this choice is tantamount to discrimination.

We only need to look to other countries like the UK, Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand to see that it is possible for the government to support homebirth and maintain an excellent safety record. I wonder why we can't also have a maternity system in Australia where women who choose homebirth can have a registered midwife funded by the government? There is an abundance of research confirming the safety of homebirth, so much so that safety should no longer be considered a rationale for refusing to support women's choice to birth at home.

There is also no financial argument for failing to fund homebirth. It is well documented that birthing at home ultimately saves the health system money and frees up hospital beds for genuinely 'sick' people. It also produces outcomes that further reduce the burden on the health system - fewer interventions including caesarean section, greater satisfaction with the birth experience, higher breastfeeding rates etc. If anything, the government should be doing everything it can to encourage homebirth, based on the evidence of its safety and the good outcomes it produces for women and their babies. If the government is serious about reducing our unacceptably high rate of caesarean section, encouraging home birth would seem a logical first step.

I have had two of my five children at home, two in a birth centre and one at a major hospital. I found birthing at home offered me a far superior quality of care and a much better experience than even the birth centre did. I was well informed by my midwife who directed me to appropriate literature and research and so was able to make my own decisions around aspects of my care based on this. As a result I felt very respected, empowered and in control. I was trusted to make intelligent decisions based on evidence and my own sense of what was right for me. I was an active participant in my experience. I found birthing at home provided me a great deal of confidence that has since flowed into other areas of my life and benefitted my whole family. I wish every woman could have the kind of experience I had! As a result of my past experiences I would never choose to birth in a hospital again unless there was a complication with my pregnancy that made it medically necessary.

We are planning to conceive our sixth child some time next year, which leaves us in a precarious position if these bills are passed as they are currently formulated. I could not happily choose a hospital birth now that I have had the "Rolls Royce" of maternity care. In fact I feel so strongly about the benefits of birthing at home that I home-birthed my

fifth baby even though she was breech I was supported by three midwives who had experience with breech births and everything went very smoothly. To date it was the best birth experience I have had. I knew I would have had a slim chance of achieving a breech vaginal birth had I been in hospital subject to scrutiny and hospital policy, where I didn't feel comfortable.

In effect, passing these bills in their current form would jeopardize the safety of myself and my future babies as I (and many others) will be left with no option but to birth unassisted at home. Although I feel reasonably confident doing this, and would educate myself about what I might need to do should I encounter difficulty, it would obviously be infinitely preferable to have an experienced and qualified midwife attend me. I feel that because my choice to birth at home is not a mainstream one, I am marginalized and discriminated against since my choice may soon become "illegal".

I can't understand why women who choose an elective caesarean have their choices funded even though a caesarean brings with it well documented risks to their own health and also that of their baby, yet my choice to birth at home is not. Ultimately it is a woman's right to choose which risks she feels most comfortable with because it is she alone who will live with the consequences. I strongly feel it is not for a government to make these choices for women. We desperately need to recognize diversity in our population - not everyone will make the same choices but we must respect each others choices.

Please devise a solution that will respect my right as an Australian citizen to choose how I birth my babies. We're not asking for special treatment, only the same access as everyone else to funding and insurance protection. Please let common sense, not hysteria, prevail.

Cheers,

Cherie Munckton