

Dear Senator,

I am a mother of two young children. My daughter was born in hospital in 2006 and whilst the staff and facilities were good, I resented having to spend this joyous time in a stark and clinical environment being disturbed at all hours by medical bustle. With great pressure on the labour and post-natal ward resources while our local area underwent a 'baby boom', I felt guilty taking up time and space that could have been used by someone who really needed it. My husband and I just wanted to be at home learning about our new family in comfortable and familiar surroundings. So when I became pregnant a second time, we called upon an experienced independent midwife and planned a home birth.

My son was born at home in 2008. It was a gentle and relaxed birth, intimate and special. Just a few hours later, my husband, our new baby and I were left in peace, tucked up in bed with a bowl of soup and a glass of champagne.

My husband and I hope to have a third child in a year or so and can imagine nothing better than giving our next baby the same beautiful introduction to life that our son had.

I am therefore deeply concerned by 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.

These bills are the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs and while they appropriately expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, they also exclude midwives who attend births at home, effectively making attended homebirth illegal.

An independent midwife attending homebirths cannot currently obtain indemnity insurance. 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.

Making it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care and an infringement of parents' right to choose where and how their child is born.

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.

Qualified Australian midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth Kenyon