

Dear Senator,

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

I am a VERY concerned citizen - my partner and I wanted to have our children at home, but the cost of a home mid-wife was prohibitive. The next best solution was to go to a birthing centre, of which there are very few, and not near where we live in the Blue Mountains. This required us to travel 2 hours by car when she went into labor. Unfortunately for us, the birthing centre where she was booked in was CLOSED the night she went into labor, due to staff shortages!!! I quickly phoned RPA birth centre to ask if she could come there (our first baby was born there). Although she had had a previous birth at RPA, they said NO since she hadn't been to any antenatal appointments there with this birth. We decided to continue with our original plan and drove 2 hours in the worst rain storm of the year, at night, to Royal Womens. Upon arriving there my partner had the WORST possible care - she had to stand arguing with the midwife on duty for a bath for pain relief (she gave birth 45 minutes later!), she suffered through a long, painful, and unnecessary internal exam lying flat on her back (which wouldn't have happened in the birth centre, or home birth). The midwife dropped the baby when she was born! And she was continually inappropriate with us in her manner (ie; saying "I told her I was going to make her have the baby, lying flat on her back on the bed. You should have seen her face! Ha ha". Because she knew she was a birth centre client.)

To make a long story short - my partner suffered from post natal depression/post traumatic stress due to this situation [Note: there were no problems during, or postnatally, the birth of our first child].

Our first choice would have been a home birth, and second best was the birth centre. But due to the current situation in Australia neither of these was possible. Our midwife at Royal Womens who was from the UK said she couldn't believe home births aren't an option in Australia. And for us, the geographical limitations to attend a birth centre made it even more critical.

Home birth should be a woman's choice!

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

Wendy Rockwell