

My name is Lisa Freeman. I am a mother who birthed my son 9 months ago through the Community Midwifery Program in Perth. As I live in Denmark, which has no maternity services in the local hospital, this meant my husband and I had to move to Perth in my last month of pregnancy, swapping houses with another family up there who were willing to have a birth in their home. I was very happy with my experience with CMWA and my midwife, and the birth was a wonderful experience, however I don't want to have to go to the same lengths next time around. It was exhausting in my pregnant state and my baby came 3 days after arriving (2 weeks early) possibly as a result of the strain. I also want my next birth to be in my community with support of family and friends. This is not possible at the hospital, which is a separate issue, and my preference is to birth in my own home with a midwife anyway.

I am writing today with great concern that the draft legislation to establish a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for all Health Professionals by July 2010 presents a very serious infringement to the rights of women to make choices about their health care during pregnancy and birth. If private practice midwives are unable to register, making it illegal for them to attend homebirths, I believe that the human rights of women and babies are threatened. I see it as a possible contravention of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995), which states "Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health".

Denying indemnity insurance to private homebirth midwives represents an inequitable failure to protect a significant group of health consumers. It prevents many women accessing registered midwives. Hospital "in-the-home" programs that are available in some states are too restrictive to offer real choice to a significant number of women. These programs are limited to very small geographic areas and they are only available to people who are categorised as "low-risk", a categorisation that does not appear to be evidence-based. They may also require women to adhere to protocols that take some of their choices away. The federal government should step in to ensure that this is not the only option for homebirth in Australia.

Women must be able to access registered midwives no matter where they live. The federal government is responsible for protecting the rights of women and their families to choose their health-care provider and to find someone who supports them to make informed decisions about what happens throughout their pregnancy and birth. Please do not support legislation that will remove women's rights to make choices about where and with whom they give birth. Please provide some measures to protect private midwifery and their consumers. Please do not force women who choose to give birth at home to do so without a registered midwife present.

Sincerely,

Lisa Freeman