

I am writing regarding the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills.

I am incensed that the proposed legislation will take away my fundamental human rights – the right for me to choose where, and with whom, I give birth.

I made the choice to homebirth with an independent midwife after long and very careful deliberation. I read the scientific evidence and found that homebirth is internationally recognised as a safe, satisfying, and cost-effective choice for women and their babies. I recognise that my choice is not a popular one, but that does not mean that I should be prevented from making it.

My experience of care from my known midwife was one of informed choice, empowerment, safety, and utter joy. My daughter was born in my bath, into my arms, and in perfect health. My antenatal and postnatal care was second-to-none, and cost the Australian healthcare system nothing.

By forcing women to choose to birth only within the hospital system means that our choices are reduced, not increased. Homebirth through the hospital system is not a satisfactory solution as many hospitals are unwilling to offer this option, and there simply are not enough suitably trained midwives to provide the service.

By effectively outlawing the rights of independent midwives to attend homebirths, a dangerous situation is created. It means that women who choose to homebirth outside of the hospital system will be attended 'illegally' by unregistered practitioners who are not accountable to anyone, who are not required to maintain their training and professional development, and who may well be much more reluctant to support women to transfer to hospital should the need arise. This scenario means more women and babies will be at risk due to the proposed legislation, not less.

The proposed legislation means that Australia is out of step with other countries such as Canada, New Zealand and The Netherlands, where homebirth is supported and has produced excellent outcomes for women and babies. One-to-one care from a known midwife is the gold standard of care recommended by the World Health Organisation, and EVERY woman must have the right to choose where, and with whom, they birth. I demand my right to choose this care.

Katherine Reynolds