

Dear Senator,

I am due to give birth to our second baby this September and have been dismayed to learn that homebirth is not fully supported by the medical profession and our government. Where are our rights? We are stepping back into the dark ages by potentially criminalising homebirth midwives and more importantly, removing a woman's right to choose how and where they wish to give birth. I understand that there are many different scenarios with pregnancy and birthing and we as women, must have the right to choose what we feel is the appropriate support and level of care with our pregnancies and our births, whether it is with a Dr, Specialist Obstetrician, Public/ Private hospital/Birth Centre or homebirth midwife.

I wish to give birth to our second baby at home. My husband and I wish to birth in our home, a place where I feel comfortable and relaxed enough to introduce our baby into the world with a calm and gentle atmosphere. Both my pregnancies are uncomplicated, so to force us to birth in a hospital or birth centre, and therefore making the whole experience medicalised is denying women, families and their babies a choice which is clearly a basic human right.

With our first baby, we intended to birth at the birth centre and we confidently laboured in the comfort and security of our home. The labour was so successful at home and suddenly I felt the baby was about to be born, however had to unfortunately endure a very uncomfortable car trip to the RPA birth centre. This is an experience that I do not wish to repeat and I want to ensure that I and all women in Australia have the choice to remain in the comfort of their home with their registered and fully insured homebirth midwife and to home birth safely with the knowledge that the government and medical profession support this basic right for birthing women.

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,

Kirsty Cassidy