

Dear Senator Claire Moore and Committee:

I am a 37 year old mother of five. I am lucky enough to have had 'low-risk' and 'normal' pregnancies and births. Having had two hospital births, two homebirths through the Community Midwifery Program in the metro area and one self-funded homebirth in the South West, I have experienced a few different angles of pregnancy, labour and birthing care.

My first two children were delivered in Rockingham Kwinana District Hospital in 1992 and 1994. At that time I had no idea that there was an alternative to hospital birthing. My outstanding memories of these births, unfortunately and for various reasons, are very negative.

While pregnant with my third child, a friend suggested I home birth. After much inquiry and research, my partner and I decided we would like to try a natural birth at home. Luckily I happened to live in the metro area and was able to access the excellent Community Midwifery Program. The support from the outset by our midwife was unwaivering and very reassuring. We got to know our midwife so well, as did our other children. She did home visits with me regularly, we addressed any issues as they came up and her advice was always sound and specific to me. It was a very different experience from a GP service. My two eldest children were included in the whole pregnancy, learning that it is indeed a natural part of life. My memory of this birth is a lot different to the first two. I was in my own environment, with my family and a midwife I knew very well.

My second home birth was a similarly awe-inspiring experience, again the children watched and my eldest daughter was able to cut her little sister's umbilical cord. I birthed in water, which was absolutely fantastic, convincing me that this was 'the only way to go'. Again I knew my midwife, she also knew how I laboured and had seen me birth before, so we were completely at ease.

When I became pregnant with my fifth child, having moved to Busselton a few years earlier, there was no question whatsoever that we would be birthing in our home. Unfortunately for the families in the South West, options are very limited. We were lucky enough to find two fantastic independent midwives willing to help us birth at home, and a supportive GP. There was however quite a large cost involved. My third home birth was as incredible as the first two, another underwater birth, with family and friends present. I received great continuous care before, during and after my birth experience. It is my sincere wish that every family has access to this amazing service.

Following my beautiful home births, my perspective on pregnancy, birth and parenting shifted considerably. I do believe that home birthing made me a much better person and parent. I believe that my children gained incomparable life experience that they will take with them throughout their whole life. My eldest son is now 16, my eldest daughter is 15 and it makes me proud to know that they have a very mature and realistic view of some of the most natural parts of life. I hope it has taught my children to make informed decisions and to approach everything with an open and inquiring mind and faith in nature, as it has taught me.

The benefits of midwifery led care and birthing at home are so far reaching and ongoing that it is hard to believe that anyone anywhere would not support women and their families who choose to have a home birth. Why will the government not help families with their choice of care and birthing unless their choice conforms to the 'system'? I can honestly say that I would consider 'breaking the law', if that law was so draconian as to deny me the choice to birth my own child with my own body in my own home with my own choice of professional care-giver.

Please consider women and families everywhere and allow everyone the freedom to choose. Please do not make it any harder for women, especially in regional areas, to access home birth (as financial considerations and midwife availability are already huge considerations for the south west home birthing family). Please do not make home birthing 'illegal'.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Kemp