

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



June 21, 2010

New York State Legislators
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12218

Re: THE MIDWIFERY MODERNIZATION ACT – BILL A8117a (Gottfried) / S5007 (Duane)

Amnesty International supports the enactment of A8117a/S5007, legislation amending section 6951 of the Education Law to eliminate the requirement of a written practice agreement (WPA) for midwives to practice in New York State. Midwives, along with family practitioners and obstetricians, are trained and licensed by the state to provide comprehensive, quality health care including prenatal, childbirth and post-partum care, and are a critical resource in ensuring that all women have access to care and can decide what type of provider and model of care best suits their needs. We support removing WPA requirement because it serves as a barrier preventing women from obtaining quality maternal care, particularly in rural and inner-city areas with provider shortages.

Amnesty International's recent report, *Deadly Delivery: The Maternal Health Care Crisis in the USA*, is part of a global campaign to fight maternal mortality and improve maternal health worldwide. As part of Amnesty's campaign to improve maternal care in the United States, we are calling on federal and state governments to ensure that *all* women have access to high-quality, affordable, appropriate and timely maternal care, without discrimination.

The care options available to pregnant women in the United States are more limited than in many other industrialized countries with better maternal and infant health outcomes. In many countries midwives or family practitioners are the usual maternal care providers for low-risk pregnancies, and specialist doctors – obstetricians – are asked to step in only in high-risk cases and in cases where complications develop unexpectedly. In contrast, in the United States, although 83 percent of women have low-risk pregnancies, the vast majority receive care from obstetricians and only 8 percent are attended in childbirth by a midwife. In fact, the US has the lowest proportion of midwives to births (0.4 per 1,000 births) of any of the industrialized countries reporting these figures.


Studies both in the United States and in other countries have documented the safety, benefits and positive outcomes for mothers and infants of a midwifery model of care. Often women are able to spend more time with health care providers, such as a midwife or family physician, than with an obstetrician during prenatal care, which facilitates the provision of advice and information as well as developing trust and improving communication. In New York, midwives attend approximately 10% of all births and achieve lower cesarean rates, shorter hospital stays and higher breastfeeding rates among the women they serve.

Midwives currently practice in 15 states without WPAs, and prior written agreements are not necessary for a woman to be admitted to a hospital nor to ensure appropriate collaboration, referral, and transfer of care. In order to be licensed by the state of New York, midwives must complete specified courses of training and receive national certification to provide appropriate, quality maternal care at all stages of pregnancy and childbirth. According to their scope of practice, midwives routinely work in collaboration with a variety of specialists and hospitals and refer patients to other providers where it is appropriate. None of these facts would change under the Midwifery Modernization Act.

New York is facing a shortage in health care providers, especially obstetric and primary care providers. The WPA requirement further reduces the number of available obstetric providers by preventing midwives from practicing, despite their qualification to do so. By removing the requirement for a "written practice agreement," the legislation will improve access to health care services, especially in rural and lower-income urban areas.

Amnesty International USA supports the Midwifery Modernization Act because it will improve access to quality maternal care, particularly for women in medically underserved areas, by allowing licensed midwives to practice to the full extent of their training.

Sincerely,



Joshua Rubenstein, Northeast Regional Director
Amnesty International USA