

**Submission
No 704**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Aliesha Carreno

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I'm writing this submission as someone who had to prepare for birth like I was preparing for battle. I had heard more traumatic birth stories from my local hospital than positive ones so I knew I would have to fight for the rights of me and my baby from the start.

I'm writing because it should not be this way, public health should provide a quality of service that is consistent across patients at the very minimum.

My midwife was incredible, beyond knowledgeable and supportive of my decisions but it was evident she was fighting policy and a system that is broken. Fighting policy and doctors on my behalf.

I made basic choices that were given to me as an option (i.e declining the GBS swab based on research that it was an extremely rare condition for such intense intervention).

I had my baby with my midwife's incredible support, where she advocated for me non-stop to have my decisions heard. After I had my baby, the doctor asked the midwife to step out of the room, leaving myself and my baby vulnerable. What I believe was a deliberate act. The doctor proceeded to tell me I needed to stay to be monitored as I had declined too many of their policies. Even though my birth was uncomplicated and my baby and I were healthy. The doctor then proceeded to tell me if my baby dies it would be because of my choices. My husband and I had prepared for this battle. A fight we should never had to be exposed to, naked and vulnerable, bleeding and exhausted. Our midwife was allowed back in and she assured us that we were great parents and I had birthed incredibly. That we always had choice, even if we had to fight for it.

So fight we did and we signed the doctors forms to be discharged against medical advice. I feel for women who did not have the support I did or the fight in them. That is why I am writing this, for my friends, for my daughter and for my future daughter who will not be born in a hospital as the risks of abuse are far higher than they should be in a place that should be centred on care and healing.

After birth I wanted to be the best mother possible after being told I was threatening my child's life. I attended public health clinics for advice and was told on numerous occasions that my 'small' baby was 'failing to thrive' all the while the midwife's giving no support and failing to see that I was slipping into post partum anxiety. I can only go into surface details as it is still something I struggle with, but I was eventually diagnosed with post partum anxiety and a dissociative disorder due to the lack of post partum care (especially as part of my post partum was through covid where women and babies were not considered and key services cancelled without replacement). This diagnosis cost me significantly both health wise but financially as I had to seek care on my own from private counsellors and psychologists.

I have trauma from my birth that I will have to unpack for the generations that come after me. My friends have trauma from more severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse from health practitioners. For my friends that can't bring themselves to write about their trauma I wrote for them and for me. If the ethical and societal impacts are not enough to instigate change. Then the cost of generational trauma and social impact investing in the sector needs to be considered.

Birth needs to be women led. It needs to be supported. Midwives need to be educated and Doctors need to know their place in birth. There needs to be accountability and consequences when a health professional causes trauma. There needs to be a consistent level of care that is centred around women, not money, or medical intervention or bias. Please for my daughters and their daughters, hold the medical system to account. Change the way we are supported in birth.