



PRESS RELEASE
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Contact: Dr Nancy Massotto
Tel: (877) HOL-MOMS

Parenting Group Denounces AMA Resolution Against Homebirth Members of the Holistic Moms Network Say Homebirth is a Safe Choice And Must Remain a Legal Right

Caldwell, NJ – The Holistic Moms Network (HMN), a national non-profit organization with 130 chapters across the United States, is deeply troubled by the American Medical Association's (AMA's) adoption of Resolution 205, which calls for legislation to establish hospitals and hospital birthing centers as "the safest settings" for labor, delivery, and post partum recovery. The Resolution - introduced by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) – warns of potentially deadly complications during delivery and implies that only hospital-based midwives practicing under physician control should be certified to attend births. The Resolution is seen by HMN, professional midwives, and birth choice advocates as an attempt to eradicate homebirth.

"A blanket resolution against homebirth as a policy not only neglects centuries of women's experiences and the inner wisdom of mothers who know and understand their ability to birth naturally, but it ignores credible research supporting the safety of planned homebirths," says Dr. Nancy Massotto, HMN's Executive Director who birthed both of her sons at home.

Indeed, numerous studies in the U.S., Australia, Switzerland, Canada, and Holland, have established the safety of planned homebirths for healthy low-risk women. Planned homebirths with qualified providers have also been found to result in a large reduction in the use of medical interventions including C-sections, labor-inducing drugs, use of forceps and vacuum extraction, and the often traumatic separation of mother and baby during postpartum recovery.¹

Dozens of HMN mothers have had homebirths and many are angry about the AMA's resolution. "Women should have a right to decide how and where they give birth," said Kasey Errico of HMN New Jersey. Errico says that, even though she was attended by a midwife in a more progressive hospital for the birth of her first child, she still had her water broken and was given pitocin, a drug used to augment labor. She says the homebirth of her second child was a "life-changing experience."

When asked why they chose homebirth, most HMN members said they wanted to be able to choose where to birth; to have the freedom to move around; to eat or drink if they wanted to; to have the support of people close to them; to be in the comfort, privacy, and safety of their homes; and avoid unnecessary interventions.

Chantal Wilford an HMN Sarasota, Florida Chapter Co-Leader, birthed her second child - an 11 pound 6 ounce boy, in water after just 7 hours of labor. She has had three homebirths in three different states. "All three births were wonderful, powerful, unique experiences that my husband and I both treasure," says Wilford.

Indeed, for HMN members who delivered their babies at home, adjectives like "empowering," "beautiful," "peaceful," "amazing," "safe," and "wonderful" are commonly used to describe their experiences.

Many mothers, like Michelle Sanders of HMN Bloomington, Indiana and Jenn Tardy of HMN Monterey, California, were so inspired by their own homebirth experiences that they decided to become midwives themselves. Amy Meister-Stetson of HMN Seattle became a childbirth educator "to instill the confidence and knowledge in other women that they can birth without unwanted interventions." Wilford became a Bradley instructor and midwife's assistant so she could encourage others to take charge of their birth experiences.

"The AMA resolution is very damaging to women," says Wilford. "Women should feel empowered and encouraged to take charge of their birth experiences, not have their choices restricted," she says. Kristin Rahn, an HMN member in Fort Wayne, Indiana who had a planned home water birth last year says she is "absolutely appalled by the AMA's stance on homebirth."

Meister-Stetson who had a planned water birth 4 years ago says she is "offended" by the AMA's statement that hospital births are "safe," pointing out that despite having more neonatologists and neonatal intensive care units than any country in the developed world, the U.S. has the second highest newborn death rate, behind South Korea and Cuba.ⁱⁱ

The U.S. C-section rate – at 31%–is at an all-time highⁱⁱⁱ and, just last August, *The Washington Post* reported that "a jump in Caesarean sections are partly to blame" for the highest maternal mortality rate in decades.^{iv}

"Granted, there is a time and a place for medical intervention in birth," states Meister-Stetson. "No doubt about it; many lives have been saved." And many HMN members welcome conventional antepartum care. Aleksandra Mihajlovic of New Jersey opted for ultrasounds and amniocentesis before her planned homebirth which was attended by a midwife and two assistants. But many believe that the AMA and ACOG's resolution is an attempt to medicalize what should be a natural process. They point to the increasing number of hospitals that won't allow women to have VBACs – vaginal births after Cesareans – thereby setting them up for more C-sections which, according to a recent government study, may mean more complications.^v

In South Carolina, licensed midwives won't attend VBACs because they have been counseled against it by the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Environmental Control. Nikki DeSalvo-Amick of HMN South Carolina, herself a doula and midwifery student, had to look for a midwife

from another state that would attend her VBAC. She traveled four hours each way for prenatal visits to a midwife willing to assist her. *The Business of Being Born* - a documentary about the medicalization of birth in America cited in the AMA Resolution - highlights womens' increasing dissatisfaction with the hospital birth experience. "The only way that birth is going to improve in terms of outcomes and satisfaction with the experience, is when families start to take responsibility for their births, but I can't see how that's going to happen when the choices are limited," says DeSalvo-Amick.

"As holistic families, we may make non-traditional choices," says DeSalvo-Amick, "but as Americans, it should be our right to exercise those choices."

ⁱ See for example, K.C. Johnson, B.A. Daviss, 'Outcomes of Planned Home Births with Certified Professional Midwives: Large Prospective Study in North America,' *British Medical Journal* 2005; 330: 1416 (18 June); O. Olsen, 'Meta-analysis of the Safety of Home Birth,' *Birth* 1997; 24, (1): 4-13.

ⁱⁱ Jeff Green, "U.S. has second worst newborn death rate in modern world," www.cnn.com, May 10, 2006; Save the Children, *State of the World's Mothers 2008* report, see Appendix: The Mother's Index and Country Rankings.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rita Rubin, "Answers Prove Elusive as C-Section Rate Rises," *USA Today*, January 8, 2008.

^{iv} Mike Stobbe, "Experts: U.S. Childbirth Deaths on Rise," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2007.

^v Salynn Boyles, "More C-Sections, More Complications?," WebMD Health News, June 7, 2006.