

(introductory music)

**INTRODUCTION:** *Taking Back Birth* is a production of Indie Birth Association and IndieBirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, everyone. Maryn here with quite the passionate issue today. I'm almost laughing how it's taken this long, but sometimes, you know, you plan one thing as far as podcast go or blog posts and you work on them, and then all of a sudden something else kind of takes center stage so to speak. And that has been the case this week so I'll save what I was working on and move right into really important issue that all women need to think about and I think are thinking about which is great and why I want to talk about it today.

I'm calling this five ways to know that the end is coming for regulation of midwives and truly this is for the women. This is for the women that are beginning to question what they see in front of them on a mainstream daily basis. This is for the women that have gotten a glimpse of what they really want in birth and what their power might be and what amazing things lie before them when they are able to make their own conscious choices in birth.

This is for the women that aren't there yet and maybe really shocked and pissed off with what they hear me say today, and they'll be debate it in their head and online like we all do, and perhaps it will change one person. Perhaps it will open up somebody's brain and heart to the idea that regulation should come to an end and we should take back birth, and we are. And that's the positive spin on today. Not to dwell on what has happened but the fact that we here at Indie Birth very much see a change every single day, and that's how we get up really. That's how we do these podcasts and all of the activities and events that we are planning because we see that there is change and that women are opening up themselves to the truth.

So if you're a midwife and you're listening to this and you are licensed, you may or may not be very happy with what I say. And truthfully I don't care on a personal level. Midwives—and I've said this many times in the 70 plus podcasts that I've done—midwives are amazing and wonderful, and it's not really a personal issue. This is something much bigger than any one of us or what we call ourselves. It's really about birth and the future of birth and how our daughters and our granddaughters and beyond—how they experience birth in the future due to the choices we are making now.

So five ways to see that the end is coming for regulation. Why women don't want it, why they want the farthest thing from it. So let's start with number one—or maybe it's number five. I don't know. Maybe we'll call it number five. We'll save the best for last.

Women are not buying into this idea anymore that birth is a disaster, that birth is a medical event. They are becoming increasingly less fearful of birth, and of course, that's

a real paradigm shift, and it happened slowly. So different people are at different stages. It doesn't mean we don't wrestle with fears about the process or about life in generally really, but in a general sense, we are becoming less fearful. Women are open to listening to these podcasts, which I think is amazing. These have taken off in a way we never expected, and it's not me. It's that I'm saying something that people feel. They feel it deep within themselves that there is this ancient wisdom we hold about pregnancy and birth as women, and we want to take back birth. We're just down with not. I guess I could just stop there, huh, but it wouldn't be as fun to keep talking about all of this stuff that I think people really need to hear.

So women with normal, healthy pregnancies in particular and honestly women who aren't super healthy are also waking up to this idea that this idea of regulation is not about them. It's about business. It's about money and control and really the farthest thing from that system's mind is making sure everything's okay for our benefit. It's not about that at all. And unfortunately or maybe fortunately I don't know I was one of these women 15 years ago or 14 years ago that had to experience what that was like to know that I wanted something else, to know that it wasn't really about me or my baby. Their definition of safety is something that really is not obtainable by any human being, and I do have a podcast on that if you want to hear more about what I think safety in birth is. The definition, you know, being 100% that we can have the outcome we want is something the medical world seems to promise everyone, and it's really a growing up I think that we're doing collectively especially as women. We're growing up to the idea that that's not true, that's not life. Birth is part of life. That nothing is for certain, but we're willing to take that responsibility and say birth is a natural event. It's not medical. This is something that just happens in our lives as women. Most of us welcome it, and we welcome the opportunity to grow and to change and to learn and to take the lessons that come, and we don't want anyone to take those things from us. We don't want anyone to control that, and we can do it. So there you have it.

Number four how do we know the end is coming? Women are waking up to the fact that state rules and regulations around licensed midwives and birth are not serving them and they are actually saying no way, no thank you, more women every day. So again I feel like I have to always say this disclaimer of it's not personal. These midwives—licensed midwives I was one, and I don't think I was an awful person then or now, but I don't think I was awful for not understanding exactly what I was doing. And the women I served when I was licensed didn't know any more along those lines than I did because it wasn't something I thought to communicate so I didn't hand people the rules and regulations that they were basically agreeing to by hiring me because it didn't seem relevant to me somehow at the time which is funny. But we all find our way.

So increasingly women are waking up to the fact that there is a list of rules that they have to follow. It's not just the rules that their midwife has to follow although that might be bad enough, but women now can, you know, just get online and read these and say, "Well, what happens if? What happens if I go past 42 weeks? What happens if my baby

is breech?” And they’re getting the answers that nobody really wants or very few women probably want when they’re hiring midwives. Most women think that they’re hiring somebody that’s really going to be of service to them and they’re really shocked to find out that that is not the case, that everything is in black and white print in states that have regulation of course as far as what the midwife can do and what the client is agreeing to. So here in Arizona and I’ve said this many times vaginal exams during labor really aren’t optional. That doesn’t mean that, you know, in some situations the midwives don’t follow the rules or whatever whatever, but on paper, black and white, if you’re hiring a licensed midwife here you’re agreeing that your labor is monitored several different ways, one of which is mandatory vaginal exams to assess progress. How on earth, does the medical world think you assess progress without that?

So again women are waking up to this. They see that they’re just as responsible. It’s not the midwives fault. They are agreeing to this arrangement, and they are saying, “Forget it. I don’t want that.” So during our last conference, rather our first conference, which won’t be our last, but our first conference in 2016, we had a women’s panel present for an entire hour of our conference. And on that panel we had sit—let me think—I don’t mean to leave anybody out but I’m thinking fast here five or six I’ll say local women here that decided this for themselves. So they woke up to the fact that the rules and regulations were going to limit their birth, and they said, “No, thank you.” And you can actually purchase this panel on our site. I believe you can. And it is really amazing. There’s a woman that had a breech baby, her first baby at home. There’s a woman that had a special scar or a Caesarean scar that, you know, no licensed person would be able to help her. There was another woman who went past 42 weeks and was dropped by her licensed midwife, and this is just a really small sample obviously of women all over the world that are saying, “Forget it. We’re not going to try and change you. We’re not going to plead and beg you to deliver our breech baby or whatever it is. We’re just going to go do something else.” And a lot of these women I know would say didn’t realize that soon enough. So they didn’t realize that at the time of hiring. They basically had to get themselves into hot water or an uncomfortable situation with the midwife to be able to say, “Yeah, no.” But I think it’s great that women are waking up regardless of when it happens really. It’s all for the same good outcome.

So yeah, women are done asking for permission, and the rules and regs are obviously a huge way of asking for permission. Other ways of asking for permission are, you know, petitioning the state for getting regulation in the first place. That one blows my mind. So if you’re in a state and you’re actively doing that, I’m asking you to open your heart and your mind to rethinking that, because you’re not asking for permission to do anything extraordinary. You’re asking for permission to birth how you want with who you want, and you might think it sounds really simple, you know, like here a bunch of years ago—and this doesn’t have to do with homebirth—but they were petitioning—they I mean women—women were petitioning the local hospital for VBAC rights. So the ability to have a vaginal birth after Caesarean at the hospital. And this was probably almost 10 years ago, but man, it made me livid. I just wanted to scream at them, “Why are you

asking for permission?” You know, asking for VBAC today is asking for simply being able to birth at home, maybe five years from now, we don’t know. But women are waking up to the fact that they do not need to ask permission for what they want to do and how they want to do it. And that’s amazing, and really promising that maybe the end of this old paradigm is near.

Okay, reason number—let’s see—I guess we’re on number three. Women are also becoming really attuned to the fact that the accessibility factor of a licensed provider is only one option, and it is the governmentally approved option. So I feel like that’s becoming more widespread. You know, a bunch of years ago I feel like more people were under this false assumption that insurance paying for midwifery care was such a fabulous thing. I really feel like that’s changing. Midwives that I know, you know, that do accept insurance—I’ve even seen some of them lately rethinking that whole idea and realizing that when that’s in place meaning insurance reimbursement that we are agreeing to governmental control of our births, of the way we care for women, of what we’re paid for, of what we’re allowed to do, that it is a really slippery slope.

So this conversation of course could be a whole podcast because many people are out there of course still saying that, “Well, then, how can we afford this, that, or the other?” But more people are waking up to the fact that there is more than one way to skin a cat, that women outside of the system—traditional birth attendants, birth keepers, whatever you want to call them—are other options, and although they don’t take insurance, mostly out of principle, there are other ways to make those relationships happen. And I think everybody’s really excited about that, that perhaps the money system is also, you know, transitioning at least at times like these and women are willing to barter their services or trade or do a sliding scale. Women as in the women hiring perhaps a traditional birth attendant are also realizing that it’s definitely worth the money so it goes both ways. I feel like everybody is kind of rethinking what value is and how we talk about value and worth in birth as far as what we want or what we’re providing. And that’s a really new conversation. Again when we were just shipping off our insurance reimbursement bill I think it’s safe to say that people weren’t and still aren’t in those cases thinking about what am I getting. Is this really what I want? What kind of service is this? Is it worth what I am paying or bartering?

So women are really thinking with their heart more when it comes to these things and getting the arrangement that works for them which is really freeing. They’re thinking outside of the box, and again they’re seeing that this accessibility issue created by insurance really isn’t serving them because it’s only showing them the one option. And it’s only showing them the option that again is governmentally approved, and that’s kind of all the way back to the first reason that governmentally approved option is really based on a different foundation. It’s based on a different paradigm of birth being a disaster or something that needs to be controlled. So women are seeing that we must choose beyond the box or we will be controlled. It’s really that simple.

Margo and I had a meeting today with a lovely woman looking to perhaps assist us here and there which is very sweet and kind, and she was the one I will credit this quote to although she didn't say it either, but she did bring it up today when we were having a similar conversation. She said we can't dismantle the master's house with master's tools, and I thank her for putting that into my brain today just for this podcast. It is absolutely perfect, isn't it? I think we say regularly here at Indie Birth that it's not about changing what's there. We're not going to try and dismantle the hospital system or the licensed midwife system either. It's really about creating a new paradigm, a new system where women are the ones saying, "No, thank you." That's really the point we all want to get to. We don't want to take away anybody's options. All options are on the table until people themselves decide to move forward.

So let's see reason number four how I know that regulation is coming to an end is women are totally seeing it for what it is. They see what a license might mean or might not mean, and they're seeing what a lack of license means or might not mean. Boy, that's really vague isn't it? So I don't think I have to say there's this belief out there amongst people although really I don't know if it's something people actually believe or just were told they should believe. I'm pretty sure they were just told they should believe that a license makes somebody better or more qualified or smarter or more skilled. If you read the history of licensing—which I would strongly encourage you to do and I should really do a podcast on that someday—there's a great book called *Making Midwives Legal* by Raymond DeVries or DeVries. I don't know that anyone is 100% on that pronunciation, but that's a great book. There's a couple others as well, but the history of licensing of course that's not unique to midwifery. A licensing is happening in all kinds of professions and fields, and really the short story is that it's a way for the government to make money. It's a way for them to kind of corner the market on who they want to approve, and of course, the people that are being approved have paid them. So it kind of boggles my mind that I didn't see this until the last five years or so. And then of course it's really hard for me to go back and remember how it was to not see it. It's really hard for me to understand how people are still holding that false belief—that somehow it means anything.

It doesn't mean anything except the licensed person paid and got a piece of paper. And really if we're going to be brutally honest here, if we're talking about it meaning education, well, I just would differ with that. Most licensing programs in most states for midwifery are infamously elementary, meaning that it is really a base level of knowledge that any one of us would have to achieve to obtain a license. And I can obviously speak from experience there. So really let's not make it this gold standard of midwifery to get a license, education wise. It's just not. The bar for licensing or certification is incredibly low, and the certifying agencies themselves and the licensing agencies themselves and the midwives themselves have also admitted to this fact. So again I think that's just something that's out there that people think they should say. It makes them feel like they have a handle on this issue, that someone has a license they're better, and they're

smarter. And if you don't, you must be dumb. You must be uneducated. You must be unskilled.

Now here's another issue I think women are waking up to. Those that are pushing for regulations—whether they're midwives or mothers or governmental people—they have this thing they like to say that, "Well, if we don't have regulation, we don't have a way of identifying those that are qualified, then we'll have all these crazy people out there doing crazy stuff." Now you can choose to believe that if you'd like. I think that is an idea that has been blown up way beyond what is actually true. That is something I think that not substantiated by much. There's always going to be sort of the exception to the rule isn't there? And just because someone has letters or doesn't have letters doesn't really mean that they're mentally stable or that they make good decisions or that they're a good person. I think it's absolutely ridiculous and insulting to the human race that we would assume that such is true. That just because the government puts their stamp of approval on somebody's ability to do such-and-such whether it's to paint or house or to remodel a garage that that's our standard of acceptance or acceptable service or care.

So I just want to be really blunt about that, and I think I did a pretty good job. I think that's something that the regulation people are wanting us to believe that there will be too many rogue midwives out there killing people and killing babies, and I just don't think that's true. And if it was true, then I think we need to have more confidence in ourselves as people and certainly as women, and if we really believe that women are that stupid to hire somebody that is a serial killer, then I think we have a lot of work to do. And it's not in the area of regulation. It's in the area of reclaiming our power.

So women are smart enough to choose who they want, but it's not my job to tell them who that is. So I'm not saying don't hire a licensed midwife if that's who you want, that's what you believe, please do it. If you want to birth by yourself, please do it. If you want to hire your neighbor or your best friend or your grandma, then please do it. I trust you, and I trust all women to make that choice. And think about it, if we only approve some of women's choices, then how are we any better or different? We're probably not better than a doctor thinking he knows better than a midwife does, but how are we supposed to support that? How are we supposed to tell women that this choice is okay but that one's not? And then somehow we're okay but someone else isn't. It is hard to do sometimes because we all feel like we know best on some level because we do for ourselves, but what is best for me is not best for you. And really to keep our human rights intact—and I'm giving away my last reason that I know regulation is going to die at some point soon—then we need to respect that all people can make choices for themselves and we don't any of us need anybody telling us what's the best thing for us. That's just not the way to give people confidence and power and that's just not the way to change where we're going.

So how do we know that women are actually waking up to these things? Specifically what regulation means. We know because we see it every single day, and so that's kind of the point of this podcast is to share that with you. I'm not really just spouting my

beliefs. I'm showing you what I see, and I know because women are taking our classes. And these classes aren't just to freebirth. I think that is sort of a myth that's out there. Yes, we do support freebirthers for sure, but these classes are allowing women to take their confidence back and their ability to connect with that deep knowledge. And a lot of them are still hiring midwives, but they want this information and they want to be able to understand how to navigate what they have chosen. And again in many cases this is a licensed provider. Heck, maybe it's even a doctor, but they want to know more of what they are signing on for.

We have a traditional birth attendant finder so women write to us from all over the world looking for people that are not licensed or regulated because this is not what they want, and I could rattle a number of countries if I was looking at that folder which I'm not. But they are all over the world. We have our Wise Woman Circle which is an amazing community of women not just midwives, but we do have midwives. Actually we have some regulated midwives and some traditional birth attendants and doulas and moms. All of these women are concerned about these issues. And they are learning together and listening to calls and really soaking in all these concepts and all this knowledge. We, of course, have a midwifery conference and skills training. We have a couple skills training coming up, and again, these are women that are opting out of the system. They are saying I want to know more. I want to do better. I want to go beyond what the world has said is good enough, and I want to provide another option for women. And I don't want anyone to tell me how that looks, and I don't want these women to think that I know how it looks for them. I want them to have an array of choices in their community.

So women are seeing this hypocrisy of licensing. They're seeing that it means that often midwives will say one thing and do another, and they see that's the same paradigm that they've been dealing with already. So these are women that are far enough on their journey to not willingly birth in hospitals, but they remember that from when they were there just as I do. They remember that paradigm between midwives and doctors and how homebirth wasn't safe, and hospital birth is safer. They see that same thing happening now in homebirth, in midwifery. They see it. They see it for what it is. They see it as a competition, and they see it as something they have got to wise up to.

I think the take home point right now is that women see that birth is theirs. That it doesn't belong to the midwives. It belongs to them. Hence, the Taking Back Birth name of this podcast. That's really the point. This isn't even about midwifery. This isn't about midwives. It isn't really even about regulation. It's about women waking up to see that birth is theirs. So as long as women continue to see that then they will stop fighting for midwives' legitimacy, and that may sound sad. Again if you're not quite with me yet. You're still writing letters to the senators and baking cookies and trying to get people onto your side that midwifery should be allowed and should be permitted and should be regulated. More women are waking up to the fact that that has gotten us nowhere and is getting us nowhere. And it is a writing on the wall for disaster. So anecdotal story, many of you know that I did my apprenticeship almost 11 years ago—most of it anyway—in

Chicago, Illinois, which was an unregulated state and still is. It's not a friendly state towards midwives, and I would argue to say that even if and when midwifery does become regulated it still won't be a friendly state for midwives.

But the point is 11 years ago, the midwife we hired was unlicensed, and she was amazing. As many of you know kind of started my journey into midwifery, but way back then they were writing letters and pushing for permission to serve women, and it's still going on. So that's the short story. Eleven years later it's still going on. They're still asking for permission. They're still hoping that somebody grants them the ability to have choices when really it's as easy as us saying that we have choices, and I'm not really going to go into the whole oh well then it's a criminal act, and this, and that. I don't think that's part of the most positive conversation or the paradigm shifting conversation because then we're really going back into that victim role where we say that we're not good enough. We're not an acceptable choice. If more women rose up to say, "No, this is how I'm going to do it," then I really do think things would start to shift. It's not really up to the midwives at this point. It's up to the women. And really I think women are doing a great job. We just have more work to do and farther to go and more distance to cover in spreading this message that we need to end control over our births because that is—and this brings me very nicely into my last point—that is our loss of our basic human rights.

So that is my final way that I know that this will change, and it might not be in my lifetime. It might not be in our child's lifetimes, but really that's a short amount of time in the big picture, and I think it's happening. I think women have put together the four other reasons that I've talked about today, and they are at number one which is you are violating my human rights as a person by telling me who I can have at my birth. So women realize there's more at stake now, and it's not really about who's there. It is, and it isn't, right? The really small issue is who's there and is she licensed or is she not or is she your best friend or whatever. The bigger issue is that we see and we feel that the walls are closing in, that soon we will have no choice. And by soon again do I mean this—our lifetime? Do I mean 50 years, 100 years from now? But soon in the big picture we will have no choice. Our basic human rights are being violated which is something we should all care about, and that's when—hate me if you will—but it's not about Sally as a licensed midwife. It's not that I hate Sally, and I wish Sally would get onboard with the fact that we are all going to pay for our human rights being violated. So that is I think the real take home point. That it's not personal. None of this is individual. I don't matter anymore in a sense than you, but we all matter. And I've said that several times as well on all of these podcasts. That it's the big picture, that each choice isn't as important as the larger picture and the collective options and choices that people think they can make and are making.

So all any of us can do is make the best choice for ourselves. This isn't me telling you not to do this or that. This is me hopefully giving you some tools to open up the eyes of people around you and just slowly have them say, "Hmm, maybe this isn't what we were



told. Maybe this isn't what we thought, and if we keep going that way, it will look like this or could look like this." I don't know either. So there you have it. Pass it around. Share it. Five ways to know that the end is coming for regulation and therefore more women waking up, taking back their power in birth, and Taking Back Birth. Thanks so much for joining me. I hope you have a great day.

(closing music)