

# Chute plan to save babies

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**S**A could become the first Australian state to offer baby safe havens – legal places where mothers can anonymously abandon their newborns – under a campaign by independent MLC Ann Bressington.

Ms Bressington has begun lobbying other Legislative Council members to support a package of legislation she will introduce when parliament sits next year.

Baby safe havens can be found across Europe and Japan, and most states in America also have laws catering for the anonymous surrender of babies. Ms Bressington said they offered a better option for desperate mothers.

“Just imagine how reluctant mothers feel,” she said.

“They’re afraid, they don’t want to keep the baby, they just want someone to take it, keep it safe and make sure it gets a good home. But at present they have nowhere to turn.

“These women will now be able to safely and anonymously hand their unharmed newborn baby to trained personnel at a hospital or medical practice and walk away with no questions asked. They will not have committed a crime and no attempt will be made to contact them.”

Ms Bressington’s legislation would allow mothers to hand over their baby to a medical professional with no legal consequences. It would

also see large hospitals equipped with special “chutes”, where babies could be placed in a warm spot while an alarm summoned a hospital worker to collect them.

The law will have a provision for parents to change their minds.

“Mothers, or indeed fathers, who seek to reclaim their parental rights, will be able to come forward within six weeks and do so. This is particularly important as the mother may have been affected by post-natal depression,” Ms Bressington said.

Ethicist and president of Reproductive Choice Australia Dr Leslie Cannold reluctantly supports baby safe havens.

“This idea is too little too late, but better than nothing, for women in a desperate situation,” she said.

“This is dealing with the problem at the very end of the line. The fact that a woman would be in a position where she didn’t want to keep the baby and hadn’t been able to properly organise an adoption or abortion or other option shows how terribly we go about educating and informing women about sex and unwanted pregnancy.”

Ms Bressington agreed the safe havens weren’t a cure-all.

“This is by no means a solution to the complex causes of babies being abandoned, but is a necessity for when they are,” she said.

The local debate over baby safe havens comes after it was considered nationally earlier this year. The case of a newborn girl squeezed

into a shoebox and dumped in a community garden in NSW in August prompted calls for the idea to be examined.

No provisions ever passed parliament.

Ms Bressington’s Bill has already won support from the SA branch of the Family First Party.

“Family First supports these measures,” party leader Dennis Hood said. “In a state where there are some 5000 abortions every year, it’s encouraging to see other options provided for desperate women where the baby is given a chance at life.

“I think the reality is we’ll probably never get to a situation where this can be avoided, but we should be doing much more to encourage women to consider adoption and foster care as real options.”

For the Bill to be successful, Ms Bressington must win the support of the Government.

When asked how it would vote, Minister for Families and Communities Jennifer Rankine was noncommittal.

“The legislation hasn’t been introduced yet so we have not seen the specific Bill to be able to comment on it,” she told *The Independent Weekly*.

“The number of reported abandoned babies in such circumstances in Australia is low. Subsequently, our priority and emphasis will remain on early intervention services to support parents to prevent abandonment of babies.”

## Safe Haven Baby Drop Off

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Thank You

## Refugio Seguro para Entrega de Recién Nacidos

Por favor no abra la puerta a menos que necesite estos servicios.

Gracias



An example of a baby drop-off point in America.