

Denying maternity care to pregnant women is unlawful and dangerous, says human rights charity Birthrights

(For immediate release)

In response to reports of a new pilot scheme at St George's University Hospitals Foundation trust (which would demand women show evidence of eligibility to receive maternity care as they book in to hospital in labour), Rebecca Schiller, chief executive of [Birthrights](https://www.birthrights.org.uk) (the human rights in childbirth charity) commented:

"It is unlawful to deny a labouring woman maternity care whatever her residential status. The current Department of Health overseas visitors guidance makes it clear that, while a woman who isn't ordinarily resident in the UK may be asked to pay for her maternity care, life-saving services should never be withheld if she cannot afford to pay or can't pay in advance.

Birthrights frequently receives calls from pregnant women anxious that they will not be able to access care during labour or who have been given unclear or inaccurate information about if, when and how they will be charged for the help of midwives and doctors as they give birth.

To demand that women present evidence of their recourse to public funds while in labour is impractical, places an unacceptable burden on overstretched staff and is cruel and inhumane to women at an already stressful time in their lives. Birthrights believes that these plans will act as a disincentive to access maternity care that will put the lives of already vulnerable women and their babies at risk.

The Birthrights legal team are working with urgency to address this issue. As a first step our lawyers will be writing to the board of St George's University Hospitals Foundation trust to outline why these plans are unlawful and demand that the pilot scheme is dropped."

ENDS

For further information please email press@birthrights.org.uk or call 0300 400 3401.

We can provide spokespeople.

Notes to Editors:

Birthrights is the UK's only organisation dedicated to improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality. We aspire to advance the human rights and lawful treatment of all child-bearing women.

What we do:



- Provide free, accurate and accessible legal information and advice on human rights and the law relating to childbearing women.
- Campaign on respect for women's rights in childbirth as fundamental human rights that maternity-service providers are legally obliged to respect and fulfil.
- Offer advice, assistance and training to caregivers, professional or otherwise.

Birthrights promotes women's right to receive evidence-based care that conforms to the best medical and midwifery standards. We do not hold views on clinical issues arising in maternity care.

Birthrights is a charitable incorporated organisation. Our registered charity number is 1151152. You can read more about our work on our [website](#) and read our press coverage [here](#).

