

Dear Senator Moore,

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the above bills. I welcome and appreciate the fact that these bills allow Medicare funding, access to PBS and insurance support for midwives who are providing care to women giving birth in hospitals, however I am deeply concerned about the exclusion of homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement.

Women should have the right to choose where and with whom they give birth. The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this is an unintended consequence and ask that you include homebirth in the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners). In New Zealand and the UK women have a legislative right to choose homebirth. By inadvertently denying women the choice of homebirth with a midwife these Bills do not just deny the basic human right of self-determination but will actually put women and babies at risk. There are some women who will continue to give birth at home (there always has been, there always will be) but will now either do it alone (without a midwife) or will find a midwife who is doing homebirths "underground" which means they will be more hesitant to transfer to hospital if its needed. Both options are not safe for women or babies.

On a personal note as a consumer I plan to give birth at home and when the time comes I will move to NZ, Canada or the UK for my birth in order to give birth at home if that is what it takes. I may be just one, but I am an Australian and would like to maintain my right to birth at home and be supported by a qualified midwife of my choosing. Women have the right to choose a caesarean section for no medical reason and the risks (not to mention costs!) of a c-section are far greater for low risk women than homebirth - does that really make sense? It is right that the woman choosing a c-section has access to funding and insurance protection and I don't?

I ask that rather than following many states of the USA (where capital punishment is still in effect), Australia follows the UK, Canada, Netherlands and New Zealand in respecting women's rights and treating all consumers equally with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Crawford