

Sunday, 19th July, 2009
Fiona Kerr

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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 concern that the above mentioned bill is limiting the rights of women to choose how to give birth. While there are many aspects of the bill that do support women's birthing rights and give midwives more powers in hospital, I believe it is a gross injustice to be effectively making homebirths illegal rather than more accessible.

Looking around the world at countries that I would consider our equal, Australia is far behind the UK, The Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand in supporting the community and midwives in whatever way they choose to birth.

In my view this bill will lead to 2 things, firstly women who have a strong desire to home birth will still attempt it but will do so alone without the aid of an experienced midwife and secondly, an even higher rate of caesareans, as those who were contemplating a homebirth are pushed into the hospital system where caesareans are becoming an accepted form of birth, not a last resort.

Personally I would not have chosen to have a home birth but would have liked to birth in a birthing centre. However I respect the right for women to birth how and where they choose and believe that this bill would be a massive step backward for all Australian women, for our daughters, and on a very personal level, for MY daughter and MY future granddaughters.

Those groups who lobby that homebirth is not safe fail to mention, the increased risk to mother and child of repeat caesareans. They talk about caesareans as if they are a "normal" way to give birth. Caesareans should only be offered in true emergencies – as my babies were and I am eternally grateful that I had access to them. However, during my third pregnancy I had full placenta praevia and at worst could have lost my beautiful baby and my own life. As it was, I spent 6 months not able to go more than a few kilometres from my house and local hospital and spent the whole time constantly worrying about what could happen. According to my obstetrician the only reason I had placenta praevia was due to my first 2 caesareans. This view is supported elsewhere.

(Review: previous caesarean delivery or abortion increases the risk of placenta praevia . Ananth CV, Smulian JC, Vintzileos AM. **The association of placenta praevia with history of cesarean delivery and abortion: a metaanalysis.** *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 1997;177:1071-8.)

Had I “chosen” to have my caesareans, or felt that they weren’t necessary, then what I went through with my third child would have led to months of guilt and anguish on top of the worry and concern that I did experience. Additionally, placenta praevia is believed to be the cause of up to 5% of all spontaneous abortions (Current Obstetric & Gynecologic Diagnosis & Treatment by Alan H. DeCherney, Martin L. Pernoll, Lauren Nathan, Edition 10, 2006).

I strongly believe that taking away the rights of women to choose how they birth and to make a natural home birth appear as something that should be feared and considered dangerous is wrong and to force all women into a hospital setting where there is currently a 30% caesarean rate is appalling.

Why is it so acceptable to have a 30% caesarean rate with all of the possible side effects involved, not to mention, the expense and stress put on our already over taxed hospitals, yet a midwife and hospital supported homebirth programme like those available in the UK and The Netherlands, is not.

Please reconsider this bill, and support our future mothers and our wonderful midwives. If this bill goes ahead it will be a very sad day for all Australians.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Kerr