

19th July 2009

Christina Reeves

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Dear Senator Moore

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

I am not going to waste my time writing about facts and figures and all of the many advantages of Homebirthing as I'm sure you have already received countless submissions addressing this. I want to express to you, as one intelligent, free thinking, well informed woman to another, what the proposed changes mean to me and how they will affect my life.

All three of my boys have been born underwater with the assistance of Midwives. My first child was born at the Moorabbin Midwives Birthing Centre in 1993. This was a wonderful option for me as I was a very young single Mum and could not afford a Homebirth at the time. I was bitterly disappointed to hear that funding had been cut years later and that the Midwives Birthing Centre and therefore, this option was no longer a choice for women. My experience there was wonderful. It was like a small community and many women devoted a lot of heart and soul into creating a haven there, providing social networking opportunities, producing a publication to share resources and information and share birthing stories. It was far more than just a Medical Institution, and provided women who were not able to afford Homebirth, or felt a little safer being within the hospital system, a choice.

I had moved to Far North Queensland by the time my second baby was due in 1996 and there was no question for me that this would be a Homebirth. My first birth was very straightforward, I experienced no pain and all was calm and relaxed and felt very natural. The confinement fee was \$1000 and was a lot of money for us. We sacrificed many things to afford that experience as we were on a low income. Again I had an amazing birth and completely admired the commitment and dedication of my Midwife who travelled enormous distances to assist the women in those remote areas. She was the only private Midwife in the area and dedicated her life to her profession.

Last year, my third Baby was due and I was crushed to find that the cost for a Homebirth had now risen to \$4,500. This was completely out of our reach. I was then shocked and despaired to find there were no longer many Birthing Centres around. The one close to us only has two birthing suites and is always overbooked, so many women who are choosing this option are ending up in the hospital Maternity Ward where I discovered that in the week I enquired 13 out of 17 births there were caesareans. This was definitely not an option for me. I contemplated birthing at home unassisted as I had experienced such easy, wonderful births and had lots of good support, however I decided that if I was on my own and in charge of 'holding' the birth, I didn't feel as though I would be relaxed enough to birth as I always had and felt that this stress might lead to a more difficult birth and could set off a domino effect of disempowerment that many women have shared with me that they experienced in hospital births, inevitably ending up requiring intervention and further disempowerment and usually a less satisfying experience.

I managed to find a Midwife who was happy to practice alone which halved the cost. I also had minimal antenatal and post natal visits to whittle down the fee even further. I felt very blessed to have had this option, as the thought of having to birth in a hospital gave me nightmares. My birth plan was to birth unassisted but to have the Midwife there to 'hold' the space for me. I feel that it was only because I knew

that I had the support right there, that my husband and I were able to spend all of our energy and focus on birthing our Baby and not have to worry about anything else. As it turned out, I had a challenging birth as our Baby was born posterior. This definitely would have meant intervention in the hospital system, however being in the beautiful space that was created for the birth, being surrounded by supportive friends and feeling very comfortable and relaxed in my own environment, I worked through the challenging birth and had a very empowering and amazing experience. I feel this was only possible because I felt safe knowing that I had the support of a professional, trained, experienced, caring and devoted Midwife right by my side. We were able to birth our Baby unassisted, because we had the knowledge and reassurance that support was right at hand and this freed us from worry and enabled us to relax which was what needed to happen to deliver our Baby without intervention.

How can you even consider removing this choice from families? Women have been birthing at home for Centuries, and we have never been in better or safer times to promote this, given our advances in technology and the updated training of professional Midwives. Discerning families are paying an absolute fortune to have this right to choose how, where and with whom they want to share this most intimate and personal experience. I believe to remove that choice would be detrimental to our society. This is not just about Homebirth, it is about removing choice from people's lives. It is about Big Brother stepping in and dictating to us how we should function as a society. This decision will not do justice to the democratic society we live in and it will completely undermine how far we have progressed in the battle for women's rights.

The argument that Homebirth is a minority group has absolutely no relevance. The fact is that it would not be a minority group if Homebirthing choices were widely publicised as being a safe option and were funded under a Medicare program, and therefore a more affordable option. At the moment families are paying to choose NOT to use Public Services! I find that completely outrageous and believe that we should take the more positive and progressive stance that other countries have done and promote Homebirth with funded Professional, trained, experienced Midwives who are eligible for indemnity insurance! This will reduce pressure on the hospital system and keep hospital beds for sick people.

I, like many other women will continue to choose to birth at home regardless of this proposition. I am outraged that my own government is placing me in a position where I will not be able to freely access the support and assistance I feel I need to make this a safe option for my family. I also feel outraged that I am even having to spend my time advocating for what I consider to be a natural right for all women and families. Thousands of women are now having to upheave their young families to make a trip to Canberra (which many cannot afford without sacrifices) to fight for our right of freedom of choice. To me there is something very wrong with this picture.

If anything positive is to come out of this it will be the uniting of thousands of women and families over this issue and the affirmation that we collectively make to support private midwives and to fight for our choice and our rights, and hopefully this will open the eyes of the public and more women may realise that there is choice out there and feel driven to protect this choice, even if it might not be their own personal choice. How can we make decisions for the younger generation of women? How can we take away these rights? I hope with all of my heart that the government reviews their position on this matter and decides to act in a more progressive and forward thinking manner and make Homebirths affordable to families and promote it as a safe choice with numerous benefits for families, for communities and for society as a whole. Let's move forward instead of going backward!

Yours sincerely,

Christina Reeves