

20 July 2009
Chee Ho Wong

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 welcome the opportunity to make a personal submission to the inquiry into the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills. In particular, I wish to comment on the issue of professional indemnity insurance for private midwives and nurses. As you are firmly aware, the current inability of private independent midwives to obtain professional indemnity insurance means that these professionals will no longer be able to practice when the Bill comes into force.

When my wife and I discovered we were expecting our first child early last year, we proceeded to research the various models of birth care available to us. Through our research we discovered the possibility of conducting a home birth with the assistance of a professional private midwife, provided of course it was going to be a low risk pregnancy. After giving much thought to the idea, we decided to proceed with a home birth and promptly engaged the services of a private midwife at our own expense. As it turned out, a complication was discovered later in the pregnancy by our midwife and she strongly advised us that a hospital birth was the best option. Of course, we accepted her advice and made the necessary arrangements for a hospital birth where our midwife continued to act our advocate at the time of birth.

I strongly believe that the issue of not making professional indemnity insurance available to professional health workers such as private independent midwives will ultimately impinge on the rights of existing and prospective parents with low risk pregnancies to choose their preferred model of birth care, whether that is a hospital birth under the care of a private obstetrician or a home birth attended to by an independent midwife. It is vital that women and parents to be are able to access the services of an independent midwife should they choose home birth as the preferred option. Of greater concern is the possibility that some women or parents may proceed with a home birth unattended which may result in disastrous consequences for both baby and mother.

I strongly urge the committee to seriously consider the negative impacts of this proposed scheme on this critical health issue. I would also like the committee to consider federal government financial assistance on the issue of professional indemnity insurance for independent midwives so that they may continue to provide professional home birth services and an alternative model of birth care for women and parents to be in Australia. If given a

low risk pregnancy next time, my wife and I would still choose to have our baby in the comfortable and secure environment of our home, with the assistance of a professionally trained specialist midwife. If this amendment is passed, our birth choice would be taken away from us and in our view, this would be fundamentally unjust!

Yours sincerely,

Chee Ho Wong