

Sonia Dezius

Submission to Senate

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

My name is Sonia Dezius. I am a mother of two children, born in hospital. After an easy hospital delivery of my first I would have liked to birth my second in our own home, yet the expense of an independent midwife meant it was not a choice. Many of my friends have experienced the joy and beauty of birthing in the safety and comfort of home through “hospital-in-home” programs. I know three people who have birthed their babies with **no** health care professional present. I am passionate about birth choices for women.

I am writing today with great concern that the draft legislation to establish a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for all Health Professionals by July 2010 presents a very serious infraction to the rights of women to make choices about their health care during pregnancy and birth. If private practice midwives are unable to register, making it illegal for them to attend homebirths, I believe that the human rights of women and babies are threatened. I see it as a possible contravention of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995), which states “**Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health**”.

Denying indemnity insurance to private homebirth midwives represents an inequitable failure to protect a significant group of health consumers. It prevents many women accessing registered midwives. Hospital “in-the-home” programs that are available in some states are too restrictive to offer real choice to a significant number of women. These programs are limited to very small geographic areas and they are only available to people who are categorised as “low-risk”, a categorisation that does not appear to be evidence-based. They may also require women to adhere to protocols that take some of their choices away. The federal government should step in to ensure that this is not the only option for homebirth in Australia.

Women must be able to access registered midwives no matter where they live. The federal government is responsible for protecting the rights of women and their families to choose their health-care provider and to find someone who supports them to make informed decisions about what happens throughout their pregnancy and birth. Please do not support legislation that will remove women’s rights to make choices about where

and with whom they give birth. Please provide some measures to protect private midwifery and their consumers. Please do not force women who choose to give birth at home to do so without a registered midwife present.

Sincerely,

Sonia Dezius