

18 July 2009

Kylie Sheffield

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 write to express my concern about the above Bills which, I understand, will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women who give birth in hospital.

While I applaud this move to provide increased access to midwifery care, I find it unacceptable that homebirth has been excluded from this funding and indemnity arrangement. In failing to support homebirth as a valid option for Australian women, the Government is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand. These nations support the right of women to choose homebirth, and fund the registered midwives who care for them through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the UK women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

I am the mother of two boys. My first birth, in a private hospital setting, was highly medicalised and involved a range of interventions, some of which I believe were completely unnecessary. Apart from being both painful and traumatic, this birth left me emotionally and physically scarred. For this reason, I was hesitant to return to a hospital setting for the birth of my second child. Fortunately, as a Darwin resident, I had access to a publicly-funded homebirth model. After a great deal of research, I decided that homebirth was a safe choice, and the right choice for me and my baby. Through making this choice, I was able to experience a very different maternity model involving one-to-one care, in my home, from a known and trusted midwife. The result was an enjoyable pregnancy and a safe and beautiful childbirth experience.

The intersection of the proposed legislation with the National Registration and Accreditation of Health Professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Yours sincerely

Kylie Sheffield