

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

I write to you from the comfort of my bed with my one week old son Issa sleeping peacefully at my side. I write rather than rest, despite little sleep last night, because I believe the implications of the above bills to be of great importance. My son Issa was born last Friday at home under the experienced and loving caring of two independent midwives – Cath and Mary. Cath and Mary provided my prenatal care and have been visiting us daily since the birth to check on my progress and that of Issa. My experience of giving birth at home under Cath and Mary's care was fantastic and it is an experience that I would like all women to have the choice to experience. However, I understand that under the above bills, an unintended consequence is that it will become illegal for midwives like Cath and Mary to support other women to birth at home.

My first son was also born under midwife care at a birthing centre associated with a large teaching hospital in Melbourne. While this was a satisfactory experience, it cannot compare to the wonderful and empowering experience of birthing my second son in the familiar surrounds of our home and with midwives that I have had time and the pleasure of developing a real relationship with.

Birth is a natural process and all women should have the choice to birth in an environment in which they are most comfortable. I am concerned about the medicalisation of birth and the disempowerment of women and unnecessary expense associated with that. Midwifery care is a way to redress this imbalance and as such the provisions for midwifery care for women birthing in hospitals provided under the above bills is long overdue. However, I would also like to see that the same provisions are afforded to midwives attending homebirths.

Not only is making it illegal for midwives to attend homebirths and not funding such midwives out of line with other developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand, but I am also greatly concerned that Australia will drive homebirth midwifery underground. Worse still, it might force more women to birth at home unattended by professional carers. This is potentially a very dangerous scenario. While the outcomes of homebirths are as good or better than those of hospital births, these outcomes are achieved with the assistance of professional and experienced birth attendants. The outcomes are likely to be very different if women are forced to deliver at home unattended.

The intersection of this 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,

Alecia Bellgrove