

19.07.2009
Tarang Bates

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. I understand that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

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.

I have personally experienced giving birth to twins in a hospital setting, which I found to be an incredibly traumatic event, then giving birth 4 years later in the comfort of my own home, which I found to be an incredibly profound experience. My hospital birth was 18 hours long; my homebirth was 2 hours long, attended by my midwife, who was paid by the NZ government.

30 years later I have attended the beautiful homebirths of two of my Grandchildren, one of them also lasting only 2 hours. These homebirths have all been wonderful family experiences, in a relaxed supportive environment. As a woman and a mother, I find these elements crucial for this sacred and very personal experience, which is to do with life and death.

Surely you could not possibly legislate against people choosing to die at home - surrounded by their family and friends. Just as surely you could not possibly legislate against us choosing the environment in which we give birth.

Yours sincerely

Tarang Bates DHPH