

16th July 2009
Matthew Houltham

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 am writing to you to express my deep concern over the details of the above bills that will exclude homebirth from gaining Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support.

My wife became pregnant in 2007 with our first child and entered the public health system with plans to birth at the Royal Women's Hospital. Due to previous bad experiences with hospital care, she was somewhat nervous about the birth but I assured her that the hospital system was the best and safest place for our birth. However, at the first two hospital appointments, I was shocked by the lack of time, attention and care given to my wife. We felt like sheep being herding around the hospital and it was very clear that the staff didn't have the time to provide anything other than rudimentary consultation.

As a result of this treatment, my wife suggested we look into homebirth as an alternative option. I was sceptical to say the least but agreed to meet with some private midwives. On meeting them, I was struck by the passion and conviction these women had for their work. The difference in attitude, manner and displayed knowledge between these midwives and those overstretched ones we had encountered at the hospital was enormous. Both my wife and I left that meeting comforted and excited by the prospect of potentially having our child at home. Subsequent to that meeting, we spoke to doctors in my family and researched the pros and cons of homebirth before determining that we would try to have our child at home.

Our homebirth went ahead as planned in July 2008 and was an incredible experience for both my wife and I. My involvement in the process was far greater than I could possibly have had in a hospital setting and it was amazing to see my wife so relaxed and happy throughout an event she had once been so nervous about. Throughout the birth I felt entirely confident that the attending midwives were capable of dealing with any potential complications and trusted that my wife and baby were in the best possible care. Fortunately, the birth went ahead without complications and my wife delivered a huge and very healthy son. Being at home gave us the opportunity to really relax and bond with our child over the following hours and days – an experience very different to many of my male friends whose children have been born in hospital. I also believe my wife's rapid recovery was a consequence of her relaxed state of mind and the benefits of recuperating in familiar surrounds.

Having been a staunch believer in the medical system, I am now a passionate advocate for choice. As such, I was mortified to learn that we may not have the option of homebirth for our future children and that the passionate midwives who attended our birth could soon be in the unemployment queue. This legislation seems to be taking a massive leap backwards at a time when countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand are strongly supporting homebirth through their public health systems. Australia is the wonderful place it is because we champion and celebrate diversity and choice. I cannot believe that in this day and age you are about to enact legislation that removes a woman's right to choose where she has her child.

I request that the above bills be amended to include homebirth and give private midwives Medicare funding and professional indemnity support. Whilst homebirth is likely to remain the option of a small percentage of prospective parents, we should have the legislative right to make this choice and be supported in doing so.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Houltham