

20th July 2009

Rebecca Denny

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.

I am astounded that in this day and age the basic human right to choose the birth that is right for you is even being discussed. Homebirth was not an option for me and my husband for our first birth and it wasn't until my second pregnancy that I realised the importance of having the option to do what was right for me and my family came to light. Because of my previous birth which in hindsight was extremely traumatic this placed an extraordinary amount of pressure on me during my second pregnancy. If it wasn't for the undeniable love, support and guidance I received from my midwife in private practice I perhaps would not have had the most empowering and exceptionally life changing event of my life. I birthed Hamish at home with two beautiful midwives, a doula, my mother and my husband. Every one of these support people knew my every need and want before I did as I had handpicked them and developed a true relationship with them all the while knowing they would give me the time, comfort, support and love I needed at my most defining hour.

To think that such a beautiful experience could be taken away from so many women amongst my family and friends is excruciating. As a midwife in private practice attending homebirths as well this hurts me on yet another level. To see a woman and her family grow through the pregnancy and to be a part of a time that is so very private is something that cannot be put eloquently into words to give it justice. I truly admire a woman who has sat down, thought about her birth, read all she can and come to a decision that is right for her. This may well be hospital, birth centre, homebirth, caesarian or natural.

Taking homebirth away has more consequences that I'm afraid have not been even considered. The cascade of effects from postnatal depression can be devastating. These range from poor breast feeding, infant illness, lack of maternal and infant bonding, marriage problems, sibling issues leading to behavioural problems and the list goes on. Surely if this is a monetary decision, the long term affect far out ways this legislation going ahead.

Women need to make their own decisions in order to have the power and ability to birth the way they want to. To take this choice away from some and not others is absolutely criminal. This legislation will not only stop midwives attending homebirths but more importantly it completely deprives women of choice when the women in my family before me, fought so long and hard to gain.

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

Rebecca Denny