

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills.

It would be a terrible day for choice and democracy if a safe and satisfying option for such a momentous occasion in life is made illegal. Birthing babies in an environment that is comfortable and secure contributes to the safety and positive start to the relationship of the baby with its family, particularly the mother.

The government should have the responsibility of protecting the weakest members of our community with regard to birth and medical care, however it also has the responsibility to make decisions based on the truth, not the desired truth.

I implore you to research and identify solutions that will integrate birth preferences and systems so that all parties can be satisfied.

Although you seek to limit the number of baby deaths through these proposed legislation changes, homebirthing will be sent underground and the number of deaths as a result of this decision will more than likely be much greater than making a decision to support and integrate the systems.

I have two children. The first born in hospital, the second at home. If I was to have a liver transplant, I would go to hospital for the medical care because it's not something I can do at home safely. I would dread, unless there was a sound reason to, giving birth to the rest of the children I plan to have in a hospital environment.

I am concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in

unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Green