

Ros Fleetwood

Saturday, 18th July 2009.

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.

Childbirth is a very personal experience and often a once or twice in a lifetime event for a woman. Her childbirth experience is something that she will remember for her entire life. As for all important life events women should be given choices and have access to options. One childbirth option which is common throughout the world is homebirth.

Women choose homebirth because they can be with people and in an environment in which they feel comfortable. Most women who birth at home establish breastfeeding more easily and develop close family relationships. This healthy start to life means that these families place fewer demands on our health system for years to come.

If homebirth midwives are not able to get indemnity insurance they will not be able to practice. This will erode a woman's right to choices in childbirth. It may also result in some women choosing the very risky option of unattended birth at home.

I had 2 births in a birth centre under the care of wonderful midwives. But my most special birth experience was with my third child at home under the care of a homebirth midwife, my husband and two close friends. I remember thinking how wonderful it was during my labour not to have to make a decision about when to leave or to interrupt my labour by travelling in a vehicle. I was at home and that felt just the right place to be to welcome my new daughter into the family.

I truly appreciate the option that I had to birth at home for this very important event in my life. I want that option to continue to be available to women experiencing a normal pregnancy.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. Please give this issue some serious thought before proceeding with these bills.

Yours sincerely,
Ros Fleetwood