

20 July 2009

Gypsy O'Dea

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto: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 am personally devastated by the thought of this legislation being passed and the choice to homebirth being taken away from women.

I am the mother of three children, aged 7 years, 3 years, and 4 months.

My first child was born in a private hospital with a private obstetrician and during the labour and birth I was subjected to an enormous amount of pressure by hospital staff to agree to unwanted pain relief, unwanted augmentation because my labour was not progressing fast enough according to hospital policy, and I was pressured for 20 hours to agree to a caesarian which staff agreed was not medically indicated but they were concerned that I "was tired".

When I was pregnant with my second child I planned to give birth at home but developed pre-eclampsia and was admitted to hospital during my third trimester. Whilst I was very grateful to receive the medical care my baby and I so desperately needed, my labour was still mismanaged in some ways and the (lack of) care I received in the postnatal ward was distressing and I believe a symptom of a stretched and under-resourced medical system. I was diagnosed with Post Natal Depression when my son was 12 weeks old and was on antidepressants for 13 months.

My third child was born at home following a healthy and normal pregnancy, in the care of an Independent Midwife, my doctor, my loving and supportive husband and my wonderful mum. It was a joyful experience for all of us, and I was ecstatic to birth in a warm, loving and supportive environment, and to let my body do what it was designed to do, without need for drugs or other intervention.

I am an intelligent woman and I am educated about my birth choices and my health care. If I am fortunate enough to have another normal and healthy pregnancy, I want to give birth at home again. And I am shocked and devastated to think that in this wonderful democratic country that this Government would take this choice away from me.

I am also appalled at the unfairness of our current system of funding. If I choose to subject my baby to the risks of a medically non-indicated elective caesarian section, then this choice would not only be approved and supported by the vast majority of the medical profession but would be fully funded by Medicare in a public hospital! Whilst homebirth comes at a huge financial cost to families, usually around \$4000 to \$6000, with no Medicare funding available for this option at all. I would ask that I have the same rights to Medicare funding as women choosing a hospital setting for birth.

Clearly homebirth is not the choice that every woman makes. But neither is elective caesarian, which is not only legal but Medicare funded. And neither is termination of a pregnancy but it is still legal in this country. Please don't take away women's right to make safe choices regarding our bodies and our babies.

**In studies around the world, homebirth has consistently been shown to be a safe choice for healthy women with low risk pregnancies. I implore you to stand up for my right as a woman to choose where I birth. Birth is not an illness, it's a natural and wonderful human experience, so please do not force me into a hospital system when I am not sick. I do not require 'medicine', I am giving birth and need the knowledge and support of an experienced and caring Independent Midwife and the choice to birth in my own home.**

Yours sincerely

Gypsy O'Dea