

Jo Reynolds

Ms Claire Moore

Chair: Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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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. 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.

Women have the right to choose where they give birth and with whom and they will continue to exercise this choice far less safely than they are currently able to if you make it illegal for them to be attended by an experienced professional. It is bad enough that a safe homebirth with an independent midwife is completely unfunded, that it should be made illegal is simply unacceptable.

Countries like the Netherlands, UK and New Zealand all have successful homebirth practices. As I understand it New Zealand midwives are in fact insured by an Australian company. It would be a tragic and dangerous mistake for the Australian government to reduce choice and safety in birthing for Australian women when other countries are clearly showing that homebirth is both safe and cost effective.

I am a mother of two, the first born in a public hospital and the second born at home - after a complicated pregnancy that also involved a private obstetrician. As a result I have personally experienced public hospital birth, private obstetric care and homebirth with the assistance of a privately employed independent midwife. I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt that nothing compares to the quality of care provided by an independent midwife.

I have also attended the births of other women's babies as a professional photographer. My own hospital birth was the only one I have been present at where I was truly impressed by the behaviour of the staff involved in assisting the birth. In fact I have had to stop accepting birth photography clients as I am no longer able to sit silently and watch another woman or her baby be treated at best with a complete lack of care and respect and at worst in an abusive and coercive manner.

I am currently expecting my third child and will not willing give birth in a hospital unless there is an actual medical reason for being there. And I certainly would not enter a hospital without my own private midwife to protect me from the sort of treatment I have witnessed other women receive at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

I personally will not be effected if this bill goes through unchanged as my last baby will be born safely at home with the care of a professional midwife before it comes into effect. But just as I will fight for other women's right to safe abortion despite being unlikely to consider one myself, I am determined to fight for my daughters, friends and perfect strangers to have the same choices that I have had. The right to choose who attends our child's birth and where we give birth is of paramount importance.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Reynolds', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jo Reynolds