

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives & Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I am writing to you to express my concerns in relation to the above mentioned bills. Although on some levels these bills present positive steps forward for maternal health care, I believe the exclusion of homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement is an unacceptable, grave error. The issue at stake is not whether homebirth is right or wrong. Rather, it is an issue of equality - for birthing women and the midwives who attend them.

Senator, I am lured into this debate not on a philosophical/moral argument but rather on the solid platform of experience. I ask that you hear my story. In 2005 my son was delivered at the Royal Women's Hospital, Brisbane. The event was nothing short of traumatic for myself, my family, and my son who still today experiences health problems. At 33 weeks gestation I experience a bleed and after presentation to the hospital I was advised that my membranes had ruptured, was given a range of drugs, and then placed into a hospital bed for the next two weeks with the doctors citing risk of infection. I experience no continuity of care and no support. I felt alone, scared, uninformed about my situation and my choices and therefore powerless. My mental and emotional health plummeted. Someone attempted to steal my belongings. I requested that I be discharged and was told that by doing so I would potentially "kill my baby". The trauma continued.

At 35 weeks I was induced - a violent process as my body would not respond to the cyntocin regime and was going into one long contraction (evidently I was not ready to birth and at 35 weeks my baby was not ready to be born). After 10 hours of vomiting and sheer agony the midwife announced that in fact my membranes had not ruptured. 17 and a half traumatic hours later, with 13 people crowded into the room (my partner and support person pushed somewhere into the background) my son was born. He scored a 10 on the APAR scale when first born, but received a shock after being quickly flipped over off my stomach onto his back and as a result his breathing started to labour and he was rushed to ICU. There he stayed for two weeks. After the birth I was taken, completely traumatized and shocked, up to a hospital bed where I was left alone, sobbing and tortured by the little whimpers of new babies in beds next to me... I just wanted my baby. Having missed this important window of bonding, and with cyntocin and other drugs from the labour blocking the flow of my post-natal hormones, the following weeks/months were extremely trying. I felt I had been robbed of what should have been a sacred and joyous event in our lives.

In 2008 I gave birth to my daughter. Given my previous experience I did not feel safe going to hospital, and feeling safe is the key to birthing safely (allows the uninhibited flow of hormones which support the woman through the birthing process and post natal period etc.). After much

research and discussion a decision to birth at home with an experienced midwife was made. We conducted interviews and choose a caregiver who we felt most comfortable with. A relationship of trust and compassion was soon established and continues to this day. I felt assured that my midwife was competent and no risk to my life or, more importantly, my babies would be taken. My baby was born easily and safely after 3 hours with no complications. Within minutes we were tucked up in bed, surrounded by family, and attended to by our own midwife. The event was a not only a joyous celebration but also an extremely healing and empowering event. The thought that other woman may soon not be able to experience this saddens me and drives me to action. Women need to have a choice... So do midwives attending them.

If this bill is passed without amendment this natural event will be effectively outlawed. I urge you to please support the rights of all women and include homebirth midwives into the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills. Let's bring Australia into line with other Nations such as United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand. Let's create a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Yours sincerely

Kirsten Baird