

Svetlana Illarionova

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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 am writing to express my concerns regarding a future of the homebirth practice in Australia. The bills mentioned above will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth within hospital system. This is a long waited support for midwifery care on the whole. However independent private midwifery practices, which provide homebirth option for their clients, will remain excluded from this funding and indemnity arrangement, because of the intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals and inability of homebirth midwives to register.

By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand. The highly developed 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.

At the same time there are some negative examples of countries where homebirth is illegal. I immigrated from Russia seven years ago. In Russia homebirths are not permitted, although it is a prevalent practice. Women there choose to give birth at home for a number of reasons. Among those reasons are not only poor equipped hospitals or indifference of underpaid medical staff (today a number of affordable high quality private antenatal and birth care options are available in Russian hospitals), but also lack of privacy, trust, unnecessary medical interventions, "automated" approach to birth etc – reasons that can also be applied to Australian reality. As a result, women who choose homebirth are always under pressure from different authorities, for instance they are not always able to undertake medical tests, undergo additional examinations, register a birth of their baby and so on. And midwives are under threat of being jailed. Despite all the difficulties of being illegal this practice continue to exist and even develop. This is an example of discrimination of women rights.

My son was born by Cesarean section in one of the Melbourne's public hospitals three years ago. I believed in high standards of health service and especially pregnancy care in Australia. But my first experience was not absolutely happy. I had a number of

interventions during labor. I did not know, whether they were really necessary and nobody explained me properly what was happening, why we needed this and what other options were available. One month ago I had a homebirth with two private midwives and my daughter was born naturally with a full success. It was the most joyful and fantastic experience I as a woman who had a previous Cesarean section could have in my life. I believe there will always be women who just need that special attention, mild care, privacy, trust, which can only be provided by independent homebirth midwives.

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

Yours sincerely,

Svetlana Illarionova