

20 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. Excluding homebirth midwives in this manner puts the cost of accessing suitable insurance out of reach for those qualified practitioners who choose to make a home birth option available to women. 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.

Those midwives whom I have met are professional practitioners who have the proper qualifications and are passionate about the care they are able to provide expectant mothers and associated family members prior to, during and after the birth of the child. As part of the birth plan developed before the birth, these midwives ensure that the women they are working with understand the need for responsible action in the event of something untoward occurring during the birth and they will always give an honest assessment of the woman's suitability for home birth.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection and a right to choose the health care and birth support of their choice. I also believe in a system where responsible and suitably qualified practitioners are supported in an equitable manner.

I commend a review of the legislation as currently proposed, to ensure that an amendment can be made to remove the anomaly whereby home birthing options are effectively prohibited as a viable alternative in this country.

Yours Sincerely,

Daniel J Ryan

DANIEL RYAN