

20th July 2009

Jane Palmer

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. 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.

Women will always choose to give birth at home and it is important to maintain the ability of women to engage the services of a midwife. The current proposals totally eliminate women's ability to access midwifery care for homebirths. Birth at home by large studies has been shown to be as safe as hospital birth for women of low risk and attended by a midwife. I personally cannot understand how the government can prevent women from accessing the services of midwife when they want to give birth at home. I have personally have given birth at home with the care of a midwife and my grandchild has been born at home with a midwife – how can the government take away this choice for women in the future. I have had over 12 years experience attending birthing women – I implore you to reconsider the current proposals to exclude homebirth.

Yours sincerely

Jane Palmer
Mother and Midwife