

July 19, 2009
Tara Webster

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.

To not have such a system is to take a big step backwards in freedom of choice for women to have the type of birthing experience they are most comfortable with, in a safe environment. If homebirth midwives are unable to work legally, dangerous situations may arise where women who are against birthing in a hospital for emotional, psychological, religious, or any other reason, attempt to birth at home without any professional assistance. I don't believe this is the intention of these bills, but it certainly creates an environment that is not supportive of women to birth in the manner and place they choose. Birthing is such an important and sacred event, we must help women and their babies to birth in the best way possible for each individual. Do not take this right away from them.

Yours sincerely,

Tara Webster