

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.

I feel disappointed that in the 21st century, in a country such as ours, women are still going to be denied choices when it comes to birth. Women have been fighting and struggling all through the ages for equality on various levels. When will this end? As a woman who has given birth at home I cannot speak more highly of the professional and supportive care provided to me by the two midwives whom my husband and myself chose to look after us. The whole experience of pregnancy and the birth of our son was one that was transformative, empowering and beautiful and made possible due to the immense dedication, care, knowledge and skill of our midwives. It saddens me to think that we, and many other future parents, will be denied the choice of a homebirth with midwifery care if this legislation and related Bills are passed in their current form.

While it may appear that my argument is purely emotive, and perhaps it is, there is no scientific data that justifies denying certain individuals the choice of a homebirth, nor are there any moral or ethical reasons to do so. In fact, the scientific data clearly demonstrates that the option of homebirth with a midwife for low-risk pregnancies is as safe as a hospital birth. (As a nurse and medical scientist I have examined much of this research closely). On one hand we have a government that provides the choice to women to terminate a pregnancy but on the other hand wishes to deny them the right to choose where they birth their babies and to deny them access to essential midwifery care based on that particular choice!

Much of the contemporary discourse surrounding healthcare and the provision of services focuses on consumer or client participation and involvement in decision-making. A person's right to be self-determining should be upheld in all situations regardless of religious or cultural beliefs and this is clearly outlined in the International Bill of Human Rights, Article 25 and Article 29. Although I am not a lawyer, it appears to me that the freedom to choose a homebirth with the support of midwifery care is a right that all women of this country are entitled to

and that this aforementioned legislation is in direct violation of this right. This proposed legislation and related Bills do not support freedom of choice and the cultural rights of women pertaining to healthcare.

Clearly, while the proposed legislation has long overdue benefits it is blatantly inadequate in its current form. As a nurse I see people make choices everyday in spite of the scientific evidence, such as smoking, that negatively impact upon their own health and wellbeing, and frequently have negative consequences for those around them. However as it is that person's right to freely choose and I can only support as best I can to achieve the optimum health outcome for clients. Contrary to this, the choice of a homebirth for most parents is done frequently following much research and self-education. This cohort of people choose homebirth in order to optimise health outcomes and it is imperative that their needs be supported by this country's healthcare system. It would be an injustice not to do so.

I firmly believe that on careful consideration of this legislation and related Bills, the necessary amendments will be made to ensure that the possible negative consequences will not be realised. I thank you for your time in allowing my voice to be heard and wish you well.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Scheelings