

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 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 gave birth to my beautiful firstborn son 3 months ago in my home with the assistance of an amazing private midwife. This experience was absolutely incredible and will never be forgotten. I chose to give birth at home because I believe that giving birth is a natural process that a women's body has been created to do. I don't believe that pregnancy is an illness, or that to give birth there needs to be Doctors, procedures & a hospital environment - unless the pregnancy is high risk & complications arise. I understand that some women feel safer and more at ease within a hospital environment, and I respect that. And I also understand that for some labours and births it is vital that the women is in hospital and has access to top medical professionals and equipment to ensure the health and safety of mum and bub. However, if a women's pregnancy has been low risk and problem-free, and there is no indication that there are any concerns for the baby's health or safety, I believe that women should have the right to be able to choose to give birth within the safety and sanctuary of their own home with a qualified and experienced midwife.

The birth of my son at home was absolutely amazing. I laboured in my bedroom with dim lights and just my husband present. It was beautiful and intimate, and I felt safe and relaxed because I was comfortable in my environment. And because of this, my pain levels weren't elevated by stress & anxiety. I wasn't in a strange place with strange people that I'd never met all around me. The midwife arrived while I was labouring, and regularly checked my baby's heartbeat to ensure that he was not in any form of distress. The whole experience was peaceful and serene - yet not unsafe. I required no drugs or any form of medical intervention. The birth of my beautiful boy Bailey was natural, with no complications or problems whatsoever. And it was beautiful. It wasn't scary or stressful or unnerving. It was exciting and beautiful and peaceful. And I believe that that is largely because I gave birth in my own home with a midwife of my choosing.

If a concern had arisen for the safety of my baby during the course of my labour, I would have definitely transferred to the local hospital (which I had signed up to). I had also organised a local Dr as a back-up if needed. I do not feel as though I was putting my little boy at risk at all by the choice I made to give birth to him at home. And there is extensive research that has been conducted (specifically in the UK and NZ) that indicates that giving birth at home is AS SAFE if not SAFER than giving birth in hospital for women with low-risk pregnancies.

Please give due consideration to this and take the steps required to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills

Yours sincerely

Kate Irvine