

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I wish to express my deepest concern about the recently presented draft legislation relating to the registration of health professionals in Australia, which will come into effect from July 2010. I understand that these bills will mean that midwives in private practice will be unable to access the professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth at home. As part of this legislation, independent midwives will lose their registration and their right to work with women outside hospital settings, which will make homebirth unlawful. On

top of this, families who attempt to homebirth with a midwife could be potentially fined \$30,000 and the midwife could be jailed.

I believe this issue relates to the indemnity insurance, and despite evidence to the contrary both the government and insurance companies continue to be ill-informed in regards to the actual safety of having a homebirth if you are considered to be a low risk pregnant woman. There is significant evidence that clearly demonstrates the safety of homebirth and the benefits of one-to-one midwifery care. A recent Dutch study involving over 500,000 women showed that homebirth was at least as safe as birthing in a hospital. I am extremely concerned that considering the world economic downturn the government of today are completely disinterested in the fact that if this legislation is passed that another whole group of professionals are going to be jobless, forced back into the hospital system or even leave Australia to practice in another country. 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, Holland, The Netherlands and New Zealand. These countries offer wide access to community-based homebirth programs and offer subsidies to families who birth at home, as they free up hospital resources for the sick.

The aforementioned 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. This issue is essentially about the right to choose how and where to birth, which is vital to the wellbeing of mothers, fathers and babies in this country. In recent months much of the discussion has centred around the fact women who choose to birth at home are a small minority, therefore it is not an important issue. This is a discriminatory and concerning way of thinking and I believe the issue has far greater implications for all citizens who

believe in free choice. I am deeply troubled that the aforementioned bills would prevent a woman to choose how, where and with whom she births.

Women who want an elective cesarean section are able to make this decision despite the known risks involved and women who wish to have particular pain relief are also able to access this even though there are associated complications and risks involved. So how can the government even consider passing legislation that will force pregnant women to birth in hospitals, or to birth without any trained professionals to assist them. The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

While those who ultimately choose to give birth to their babies at home are considered a small minority, the number of people who understand and believe that preserving choices in childbirth are much greater. A woman's choice in how and where she gives birth is her absolute right in Australia.

I support a system where all citizen's of Australia are treated equally, with the same access to funding, the same insurance protection and the right to choose where and how they give birth to their babies.

Yours sincerely

Paula Reed