

17.7.09

Marian McCarter

Ms Claire Moore

Chair

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto: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 am deeply concerned about the above bills. The way I understand it is 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 am a professional woman, an occupational therapist, and have chosen to have my three children at home. They are now aged between 21 and 28. They all plan to have homebirths if at all possible when they have children of their own. We would all be devastated if this option were removed. Mind you, if it was me I would manage it somehow despite the risk. I know the hospital system very well, and I know my own body. I believe a trained midwife, many of whom I know, is the safest option for all – mothers and babies. Without the ability to engage a midwife women will take birth into their own hands and when you are giving birth, as you may know if you have been through the experience, you aren't exactly in the right state of mind to know if you or your baby are in danger.

My son, daughter-in-law and I recently watched the video taken at his birth and it was profoundly moving and wonderful to be reminded about the experience.

Perhaps you are not generally amongst the people who would choose this option. Perhaps you think they are all a bunch of hippies. Well I can assure you it is not the case. Many medically trained people choose this option – it is so absolutely normal! It is not a sickness or disease and this 21<sup>st</sup> century obsession with medicalising something so innately part of our nature is scandalous.

Please ensure that this oversight (or draconian echo of burning midwives at the stake) is not enshrined in legislation that removes a fundamental right of families to have choice over

their lives. Birthing at home is the very best option as far as I am concerned. In fact, I never even considered having a baby until this option revealed itself to me. I hope to be present at the home births of my grandchildren. Don't make us go 'underground'. It is not something we should need to hide from the world. It is a time to rejoice.

Yours sincerely  
Marian McCarter