

Dear Senator Moore,

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

I am writing due to my serious concerns 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. However, I am very disappointed to see that homebirths are excluded from this arrangement.

Other nations, including the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand, support the right of women to choose homebirth and to 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.

After giving birth to my first child in a public hospital with a private obstetrician, I chose a homebirth for my second baby. The two experiences could not have been more different. With my private midwife, all my antenatal visits were in my own home, which made things much easier for me and my three-year-old son. Each visit was about an hour and all my concerns were addressed each time - in contrast to my previous experience, when my obstetrician reluctantly squeezed time for questions into my 10- or 15-minute timeslot. I was able to ring my midwife any time I had any concerns. And the birth itself was an amazing experience. The midwives attending checked the baby regularly but were unobtrusive and allowed the birth to progress naturally, giving increasing support as it was needed. I also had wonderful postnatal support, including six midwife visits - more than I would have had with any other care option available to me.

After the birth, I had a hugely positive feeling about the whole experience - a wonderful sense of believing in my own abilities. I believe this has helped me in many ways - including bonding with my baby, recovering from pregnancy and childbirth, and managing my growing family. I speak to a lot of new mothers and many of them have a very negative feeling about their childbirth experiences. Many have also had poor outcomes that were due in part to interventions that could have been avoided.

I feel very strongly that the option of homebirth should be available to every woman. There will always be women who want a homebirth, and if this practice is driven underground in our country it will endanger women's lives.

Yours sincerely,

Isabel Palethorpe