

Dear Senator Moore,

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

I am writing because I am very concerned about the impact of these Bills on families' ability to choose an appropriate setting and a suitable birth attendant for the birth of their children in Australia.

As the Bills currently stand, independent midwives will no longer be able to attend births in family homes, and therefore safe, supported home birth will cease to be a legally available option for most Australian families. I am shocked that women and their families will be faced with either treating birth as a medical condition and going to hospital, where both the labouring woman and the baby are at increased risk from unwarranted surgical intervention (e.g. a caesarean section rate of over 30%, far in excess of World Health Organisation recommendations), or birthing at home without competent professional support.

No-one questions the right of women to choose private obstetric care in this country, or the right of obstetricians to attend births outside of the public medical system. Why, then, should Australians lose access to private midwifery care, and why should midwives not be able to operate in private practice? Their safety record is outstanding and they provide an excellent standard of care with an extremely high level of satisfaction among the women and families they serve. Research evidence strongly supports midwife-led care as a safe option for the vast majority of pregnant women and their babies, and demonstrates the immediate and long-term health benefits of minimal intervention as experienced in homebirth.

Making professionally supported homebirth effectively illegal could only mean that the parliament has ignored both the research evidence on women's and babies' health and the submissions of women who choose to have their babies at home. It would be a retrograde step in terms of best practice and it would put lives at unnecessary risk as some women will choose to give birth at home without a qualified attendant rather than subject themselves to a medical model of birthing care.

I have experienced both systems as a birthing mother, and this has left me in no doubt that independent midwifery is a vital asset that our country cannot afford to lose. I urge the Senate to ensure that the current Bills are amended to protect the future of independent midwifery and the right of future generations of Australians to be born with proper care in their own family home.

Yours sincerely,

Nadja Osterstock.