

Dear Senator Moore

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

I write 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.

My own experiences have emphasised the importance of registered midwives supporting homebirths. I have had two children born safely and exquisitely at home, and was superbly supported by a registered midwife in each case. I found the contribution of these professional birth attendants fundamental to the well being of myself and my family. They were essential to us having low risk low intervention and highly emotionally satisfying births. We owe them credit for our mental and physical health at this important time in our lives. I have also worked as a doula (birth support person) for two years and supported many births at home and in the hospital. These experiences have led to a deep passionate desire for women centred care to be widely available as a birth option. Independent registered midwives can provide this care, unspeakably valuable to women and the wider community.

The medical literature supports homebirth as an equally safe alternative to hospital birth, when attended by a registered midwife. I would hate to see this option eliminated in Australia for a number of reasons. Firstly for the safety and wellbeing of birthing families, as women who want natural births may be forced into accepting less safe options to give birth in the way they want to, or to risk the complications of interventions in other settings. Secondly for the expense of the medical system, home births have not only been shown to be equally safe as hospital birth but also to result in less expensive intervention. Lastly I believe it is a basic human right for a woman to choose how and where she gives birth. Independent registered home birth midwives play a vital role in providing this for our community and deserve all our support.

Yours sincerely

Julie-Ann Henninger