

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.

As a woman who chose to try a homebirth and worked with a wonderful home birthing midwife, I know how difficult it has been for them to continue to offer their amazing services without access to Professional Indemnity insurance. Despite what the press would have us believe, and despite a few saddening experiences, homebirth is still a safe option for healthy women who show no complications during their pregnancies. Remember, we are not without the correct medical support in these situations - home birth midwives are just as well trained as hospital midwives. I think that it is erroneous to assume that because of a few isolated incidents, homebirth is an unsafe choice for ALL women. Imagine if all pregnant women made the same assumptions about hospitals (with their much higher risks of complications) that the government is making about home birthing. Hospitals would empty.

Women deserve the right to choose where and in what way they birth their child. Home birthing women are not uneducated people who are simply 'unaware' of the dangers. In a normal healthy woman, there are no real

dangers, particularly if we are allowed access to the women and men who can support our home birthing experience with their specialized medical knowledge and experience. Home birthing women choose not to go to hospital because they want to reduce the possibility of unnecessary interference. They want to experience the intimate and powerful nature of birth within an emotionally supportive environment. Birthing is, after all, a very natural and normal part of most women's lives. Without access to the people that can help us do this, and without government support behind the rights of women to homebirth if they choose to do so, we are taking a step back into the dark ages.

As a British ex-pat, I would welcome new legislation which supports homebirth, home birthing midwives and doctors, and continues to affirm that all women have a right to choose what is best for them. Taking our choices away simply sends the message that the government believes it knows what is best for each individual and that they believe they have more rights over our bodies and our babies than we do.

Yours sincerely

Mrs K Skarbek