

9 July 2009

Catherine Kato

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: 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 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.

I believe that women should be able to choose where they wish to give birth, and with whom. For the majority of women, this will be in the hospitals. However for a growing number of women such as myself, many of us well-educated and well-informed, the option to give birth at home with qualified and highly experienced midwives is an extremely preferable one. I feel very distressed that the current Bill as proposed will make it illegal to do so. I felt extremely safe and confident with the choices I made for the birth of my first child. Although we ended up transferring to hospital due to signs that she was distressed, it was due to the experienced and well-informed judgment of my midwives that we made this decision, and were able to birth a healthy baby. I had every confidence in their recommendations at each step, and would hope to be able to have the same options for future births. I therefore strongly urge you to reconsider the implications of this Bill, and allow homebirth midwives to be included.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Kato