

9th July 2009

Ally'tiani Ki

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.

After spending years living in New Zealand and watching and being involved in the nursing and midwifery systems there, I found, upon returning to Australia to live, that it was absolutely unbelievable that women could not choose homebirth as a valid and government funded option for birthing their child. Midwives in NZ have complete autonomy, and indeed, work in a wonderful environment of support, co-operation and respect with the Obstetric GP's, Obstetricians, Gynaecologists and indeed all the surgeons.

It is such a common sense system which works so well for everyone, most of all for pregnant and labouring women. Women have complete freedom of choice from the outset of their pregnancy – they may choose to plan for home birth, birthing in an annexe or birthing centre, or hospital admission. They have continuous care by the same midwife throughout their whole pregnancy, can have consultation with

Obstetricians if requested or required. The midwives are fully insured, have full prescribing rights, and fully funded by the government.

I cannot believe how backwards the whole system is in Australia here, and it is actually very disheartening and saddening to see a system which seems to be based on fear and mistrust. And also on false statistics. Recently I found out that fetuses which pass away in utero and are then delivered in hospital, are NOT included in the mortality statistics for hospital births. I would not find a problem with this, except that, in the same circumstances, but with mothers who choose to deliver their stillborn babies in their home environment (which is a very valid choice, and actually has been shown to help with the entire grieving process for the mother and the family), these deaths ARE included in mortalities for home births! This is just ridiculous. And completely unfair and untrue.

I live in Western Australia. My first child was born in a small annexe/birthing centre beside a hospital in Hornsby Kuringai in 2000. I wanted a home birth but could not afford an independent homebirth midwife, then (around the Sydney region) charging \$5000 a pregnancy. I had a team of midwives, of whom I saw a different midwife 4 times throughout pregnancy, which was not ideal as I did not get to bond with any of them. I went into labour at home, went over to the annexe about 0300am, had my beautiful baby boy, completely drug free and with no intervention and with no doctor present, simply one midwife, at 0540am and then went home at 0800am. And, although overjoyed with my new son, I thought to myself, "Why did I have to go through that?, and put him through that change of environment, traveling, bright lights etc etc, for no reason at all?"

My second baby I had at home here in Busselton, in 2008 - a water birth, (which I was not offered as an option in 2000) – with the most wonderful male homebirth midwife, who had been entirely thorough throughout my whole pregnancy, and who had developed a great rapport with myself and my family over the previous 8 months or so. And indeed, he has remained a friend of ours ever since. It was the most peaceful, calm, relaxed and perfect birth I could ever have imagined or wished for. Present only were my husband, son, midwife and our beloved dog. I had freedom to be myself, to be in my own home, to do whatever I pleased – shower, hop in the tub, eat, drink, play music, walk outside under the stars.... It felt exactly how Mother Nature intended birthing to be. Once my gorgeous wee girl was born, again completely drug free and complication free, my midwife shared in our joy, and then left us all be, to take our little girl to bed with us and simply enjoy each other and our new angel. As thorough as ever, he then visited every day for the next week, then continued to visit regularly for the next 6 to 8 weeks, ensuring both baby and myself were healthy and well. She is to this day a calm and content wee baby, and has never been into a hospital in her life.

These midwives are so competent, and so capable, and so dedicated. And they also have that extra special something. Something that we are missing in the society in which we live today. Throughout history, every race, tribe, community, has had it's midwives. And these people knew the women – they were their friends, and were therefore intimately aware of the woman's individual needs on so many levels.

How can you condone a Bill that denies women the chance to experience such wonderful and content experience of pregnancy and childbirth? If women choose to plan a hospital birth, or are high risk cases for whatever reason, that is fine. But for low risk women, who want to birth the most natural way God intended, it is criminal to take away that choice for them, and it is also criminal to take away their right to have a midwife with them. In effect, this would be forcing some women into an unsafe situation, where they choose homebirth yet are not allowed to have a midwife present to assist and to intervene if complications arise.

I hope that this is simply an oversight in the Bill. The other parts of the Bill are a great step forward, and you obviously see how competent and autonomous midwives are. I tell you, if you think that all midwives are competent and safe, you should meet some homebirth midwives, because they are sensational.

Please consider my comments, my story and my requests. Please include homebirth midwives in this Bill. It will be a huge injustice if they are not.

Thank you for your time,

Love and light,
Ally'tiani Ki