

10 July 2009

Samantha Madden

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.

After watching the documentary titled "The Business of Being Born" about the US birth and health system I was horrified that they are so limited in their choices and it is considered abnormal to choose a homebirth. Their system, which medicalises birth, is disgraceful and by no means should Australia be aiming for a system similar to that.

I have one child, who was born in an Australian private hospital. I had no medical intervention, I laboured completely at home until fully dilated with the assistance of a Doula. My daughter was born a matter of hours after arriving at hospital with no assistance from the medical staff, my private obstetrician was not even present at the birth. The midwives performed all the necessary roles at the birth. This is a classic case of a birth which could have occurred at home however, it worked out cheaper for us to undertake this in the hospital system. We employed the support of a Doula (a training birth assistant) to assist us during the birthing process to enable us to stay at home as long as possible and also to prevent medical intervention where unnecessary. We are seriously considering home birth for second child, however this will not be possible under the proposed changes.

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.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Madden