

Robyn Stephenson

BChiroSc, MChiro

Chiropractor

Provider No. 2732043H

ABN 13 241 505 142

YASS

chiropractic

Yass Chiropractic

41 Comur Street

PO Box 884

Yass NSW 2582

Ph/Fx. 6226 5110

info@yasschiro.com.au

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Dear Senator Moore

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

I am writing to express my serious concern about the above bills. I do 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, which is all very well in itself. I do agree that Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. However, I do not think it is prudent to narrow women's choices by excluding homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this, Australia is falling out of line with modern 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 UK, women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

It seems that marrying this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering – and therefore may prevent safe homebirths from occurring. I do hope I am not foolish in thinking that this is just an unintended consequence. Therefore, I ask that you please take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills. A recent Dutch study of 500,000 women showed homebirth to be as safe as hospital birth; so why limit a woman's birthing place to only the hospital, when she may feel more comfortable delivering her baby in her own home?

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. As the system stands, without indemnity insurance, I cannot even practice as a Chiropractor. So we must protect women's rights so that there are choices regarding childbirth. I would like to have homebirths when I have children, and under this new legislation, I might not be allowed to do this in the safety and comfort of my own home, with a midwife. Neither might some of my female patients.

I think it is of utmost importance to amend this Bill, before it can be passed by the Senate. This is about women's rights and women's choices. If this Bill is passed unchallenged, it essentially means homebirthing will cease to exist – legally – in Australia. This means that there will still be some women who might go down the homebirthing path with no trained hands at the birth, which I'm sure you and I would agree is a potentially dangerous situation. To avoid this, and to give women the choices they deserve, this Bill must be amended to allow for registration of Homebirth Midwives.

Regards,

Robyn Stephenson
Chiropractor