

10 July 2009
Pip Cooper

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.

My own experience includes two wonderful hospital birth centre births and one homebirth. Through all my pregnancies I was given wonderful expert care by midwives both in the hospital system and at home and I would hope that my daughters will experience the opportunity to choose how and where they want to give birth and with whom. My older children were a vital part of subsequent births and now see birth as a beautiful and natural part of life, not something to be feared. Maybe our legislators could gain from their insight and experience.

The right to make these choices in a vital part of a positive birth experience, feeling comfortable and confident with your carers gives you a greater chance to trust the process of birth and reduce the need for medical interventions.

Every woman deserves the opportunity to choose her way of birthing and homebirth is an important element in the mix of options. Like all things homebirth is not for everyone but it should not and must not be ignored as a wonderful birthing option and nor should it be made illegal.

I trust that the wonderful progress that is currently being made in maternity care in Australia will expand to cover the option of homebirth for each and every women who would choose it.

Yours sincerely

Pip Cooper