

Min Freedman

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 will require midwives to be registered and to be eligible for registration midwives are required to have medical indemnity insurance. This requirement for insurance and registration will automatically exclude independent midwives, as they are currently unable to obtain insurance.

The proposed legislation will therefore result in the practice of independent midwifery to be illegal, and reduce the birthing options for women in Australia. Currently homebirths account for less than 0.5% of the births in Australia, which I believe is due to the lack of education on the advantages and safety of home birth. By excluding homebirth as an option for the women of Australia, the government is failing to recognize women's freedom of choice of where and how they give birth. In addition, by requiring all women to give birth in hospital the government is inadvertently increasing pressure on the hospital system, which in turn will result in poorer quality of care for an already stretched institution.

The government has stated that the Maternity Services Review was to create a 'collaborative care model', however despite an overwhelming majority of submissions discussing the importance of homebirth (53%), the proposed legislation clearly shows the government has failed to meet its stated objective due to the blatant omission of independent midwifery and homebirth as an option.

By enacting the proposed legislation as it stands (without including independent midwives) Australia will be the only country in the developed world that makes homebirth illegal. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth and the U.K. is setting targets to increase homebirth numbers, which will reduce reliance on their hospital system.

I am a mother-to-be and after looking into the public hospital option, I have chosen a homebirth with an independent midwife. I believe this option is providing me with superior care as I have the continuity of service by an extremely experienced midwife who is available 24/7 throughout my pregnancy. By building a relationship of trust and understanding with my midwife, she will understand my needs and desires during the birthing process, however will also intervene if the medical need arises. If this option were not available, as the proposed legislation would ensure, then I would be forced to utilise the hospital system which offers no continuity of care for mothers-to-be. Alternatively I could still birth at home however without any medical support at all, which personally would not be an option for me.

I support a system where all people are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. I therefore ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

Yours sincerely,

Min Freedman