

12th July, 2009
Amelia Flanagan

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.

Although I would not choose a homebirth myself, I fervently believe in the right of every woman to do just that – choose how they would like to have their baby. I feel this proposed legislation in its current form would remove this right.

I am also concerned about the added strain this virtual banning of homebirths will place upon our medical system. I live in Ballarat, Victoria, which has one of the highest birth rates in Victoria. Our public hospital already regularly deals with overcrowding – how much worse will this be made when homebirthing mothers are forced to also have their babies in hospitals?

Perhaps my greatest concern is that homebirths will not end as a result of this legislation being passed. Instead, many homebirths will still take place, but without the crucial assistance of trained medical providers. This could lead to many tragedies, all which will be easily avoided through an amendment to this proposed legislation.

Yours sincerely

Amelia Flanagan