

Senator Moore
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation

11 July 2009
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills

My name is Elaine and I am a mother who had a homebirth for my second child at home in Ireland where homebirth midwives are also going into extinction. These midwives have decades of experience and this experience is being lost and not passed on to new midwives who are working within the 'system' and being trained by doctors, for frying out loud – what do they know!!!!!! I was horrified when I arrived in Australia and found out the situation is worse, how can that be? Giving birth is not a medical procedure - it is a natural act. How can Australia count itself as a first world country when it is outlawing homebirth? The choice to be able to give birth at home or in a hospital is a right of every mother. In UK and starting in Ireland the two systems are working together, recognising that having one midwife attend a woman through her antenatal, birth and post natal care gives a higher rate of success to breastfeeding. Successful births are about combining the systems, and the promotion of this facility should in the end reduce costs for Governments in not having to fund a hospital bed for every birth. How ridiculous is this? In Ireland the government goes further by recognising this cost saving and giving a grant of Euro1000 to every home birth mother to help with the cost of an independent midwife, this along with the introduction of birth centres is going a long way to putting Ireland in the 21st century. I hope this government will see sense and amend this legislation to move Australia in to the 21st century as well. These midwives should be included in the system and given young mid-wives to train up, so their wealth of experience can be passed on and not lost as it surely will be if this unfair legislation is enacted.

I am concerned at the *Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009*, the *Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009* and the *Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009*, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work. This is a basic human right of choice.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Gazzini