

12 July 2009
Tim Shelton

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.

Two of my own children were born at home attended by an experienced and qualified midwife. I don't believe in "home birth at any cost", but I do believe healthy mothers and qualified midwives can manage the risks associated with childbirth. The benefits are a much more natural and less medically invasive birth. Most importantly the wishes of the mother are considered in home birth and the baby is allowed to bond in the initial moments after the being born, which is of great importance. This is often not possible in hospital births due to the fact that medical intervention and the hospital procedures take precedence.

Please don't allow Australia to fall behind these other progressive countries in this important aspect of our society. Please don't pass legislation that may cause home birth with qualified midwives to become illegal.

Yours sincerely

Tim Shelton