

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.

To exclude homebirth as a viable option for Australian families is a grave mistake. It is a birthing choice that is incredibly important to me, my family and to women across Australia. In non high-risk pregnancies homebirths have proved to be a safer and less stressful for both mother and baby. I was living in New Zealand when I gave birth to my first child. I went through my pregnancy under the care of an independent midwife which meant that I had a consistency of care, and while I came to trust my midwife, she developed a strong understanding of me and my clinical background - something which doesn't happen if you have to see whoever is on duty at the hospital. I chose to give birth at home which meant that I laboured in a familiar space, with my family and two midwives around to support and monitor the process. In the end, due to the time limits that NZ legislation places on second stage labour at home, I transferred to hospital and had my daughter there with no medical intervention within 40 minutes of arrival. Within 3 hours we were all home again, in the comfortable environment of home, with my midwife visiting regularly to help us learn how to breastfeed, bathe and care for our child.

Although I gave birth in a hospital in the end, being able to labour at home, and to do so with the support of a midwife who I knew and trusted was incredibly important, as was her ongoing care for 6 weeks after the birth. This experience is in stark contrast to many stories I have heard from Australian mothers who have not had consistency of care through their pregnancy, and have felt a real loss of control of their birthing environment through their labour and birth, and who have no ongoing support after they leave hospital. The result is a more stressful, and thus less safe, birth experience for both mother and baby.

In an attempt to replicate my positive experience of care in NZ, I have chosen to have an independent midwife in Sydney for my next child who is due in February 2010. All going well I hope to have this baby at home, but I know that the hospital system is there as a back up if we need it. What is most important though is that I know and trust the person who is caring for me and my baby through the pregnancy and birth, because when it comes to making difficult decisions in labour it very important for

both my midwife and I to have a good trust and knowledge of each other. I recognize that homebirth is not the best option for everyone but I think it's really important that it remain an option for Australian women.

Please ensure that the Amendments to the Bill will protect my right to give birth to my children at home, under the care of a trained and registered midwife.

Yours sincerely

Katharine McKinnon