

Dear Senator,

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

I am a mother of two children, with another due in three weeks. My first child was born in hospital and my second at home. I felt far more comfortable and safe in my own home than in hospital, and I believe that this was one of the reasons why my second labour was far easier and more enjoyable than my first. Our family is planning a home birth for our third child.

Of course, if something had gone wrong with my second labour, I would have made use of, and been extremely grateful for the availability of high tech maternity care at hospital. However, because of the nature of the hospital environment, roughly 30% of women in Australia end up with major complications and a cesarian section. In the home environment, women feel so comfortable that a far smaller amount, roughly 5-10% need to go to hospital for a cesarian section. These statistics show part of the picture of why birthing at home produces far superior outcomes for mothers. It is also a far cheaper option for the government, placing less of a financial burden on the community.

Since it has now been proven beyond doubt by a Dutch report on 500,000 births, 60% of which occurred at home, that home birthing causes no additional risk to the baby, I believe it would be a highly misogynist act, to take away a woman's right to safely birth at home.

This is what the Government would be doing if the following bills are passed without appropriate changes made.

These are 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.

Yours sincerely,

Greta Werner