

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.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE:

I am one of the many Australian women outraged and dismayed by the short sighted and patriarchal legislation being tabled in parliament that will potentially take away my right to choose a safe birth for my children and myself in the place of my choosing.

I chose an independent private midwife for my pregnancy, birth and post natal care with my first child Lyra. Living in Kalgoorlie in WA, I was very pleasantly surprised to find a practicing homebirth midwife in my town. I chose this option because it was the only way I could get continuity of care from a midwife I knew and was familiar with for the entirety of my pregnancy, labour, birth and post natal care. The midwife took the time to know me as a person, took the time to find out what I wanted for my birth and supported me in that fully. Thanks to her support and guidance I was able to achieve my dream of delivering my baby intervention and drug free with NO complications (believe me it WAS NOT EASY). Now even though we planned to birth at home, my entirely responsible midwife had us all transferred to the local hospital when things weren't going as well as she would have like to be on the safe side, under the current system and because she is also a staff member at the hospital, she was able to continue to be my carer throughout the remained of my labour and birth (being a great comfort to myself and my husband in the whole process). Because I had employed the midwife to care for me postnatally I was able to leave the hospital 6 hours after her delivery to be visited daily by her for 10 days where she supported me,

kept an eye on my progress and helped me to establish a successful breastfeeding relationship with continues to this day. I am one of VERY few women I know or have spoken to who have had a positive and empowering experience of what is the most challenging right of passage a woman faces, I believe it is because I took the time to make informed choices, prepare fully and because I had continuity of care from a caring and supportive midwife from start to finish.

With out the support of my midwife I am certain I would have faced the prospect of a caesarean (as confirmed by my GP after the birth). At the very least would have endured no less then 4 shift changes of midwifery staff during my labour, labour augmentation (as the progress of my labour was outside the "norm" and it was a suggestion I rejected with my midwife's), which more than likely would have led to the need for pain killers (which have a whole range of unwanted and well researched side effects). On an emotional level I may have felt general feeling of loss of control of my circumstances, disempowerment and fear all of which inhibit the birth process and make intervention more likely.

Now since these things are usually about money I must point out there is more than an emotional COST to all these interventions and the government should be THANKING me for saving them money by not needing them and for leaving hospital early!! NOT taking away my right to make this informed choice for myself, a choice that has been proven to be as safe as a hospital birth for mortality and having better outcomes for morbidity. I paid \$3000 for the privilege, money I consider the best I have ever spent however I don't agree that I should have to pay more for my choice than woman choosing hospital birth. Intelligent, health conscious people SAVE the government money in health care costs and should be supported and encouraged NOT penalised.

Women like myself, who make the choice to employ a dedicated private midwife and possibly give birth at home do not make the decision lightly. We are intelligent people who do a lot of research and make the decision we feel will offer us the outcomes we are looking for in this most precious, empowering and vulnerable time of our lives. In my mind this legislation is akin to taking away a woman's right to a safe abortion, taking the option away legally will only force the practice underground putting women, babies and midwives at risk.

In our "developed" and advanced nation we need to be increasing health care choices not limiting them. Come on! It's even a supported option in New Zealand for goodness sake! We need to be working to find solutions that provide the options for health care woman OBVIOUSLY want and have a RIGHT to! I whole heartedly support the Maternity Coalitions suggestion: Provide professional indemnity insurance for homebirth care, with Commonwealth assistance. This is the only reasonable long-term outcome.

Sincerely,

Kerryn Lockhart