

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.

I am a member of The Birthweek Association, a group of passionate and committed women and men who work together to create an event once a year, where people come together to share their stories, share valuable knowledge and support each other at a grassroots level. I believe that giving birth is not an illness, and it is the midwife, not the doctor who plays a primary role in assisting women during labour. Midwifery is an ancient art and skill, an age-old tradition that is well respected and supported by all the people I have spoken to about this issue. Many of my peers would rather have their children at home as they consider it the safest, most comfortable option for them, and they are willing to pay the extra cost. They have very good reasons for making this choice, and I don't see why it should cost more for people to have their children at home, when in fact this choice would cost the public purse a lot less overall. In fact this birthing choice should be encouraged and supported for healthy people with no complications, as it is in the Netherlands. It is a simple, healthy choice for healthy people, and it should be supported and encouraged. At the very least, individuals who so wish, should have the right to privately employ a midwife of their choice so that they have the essential support they require for their chosen birthing plan, and again, I urge you to amend your proposed legislation to include and cater to the choices of these particular consumers.

Yours sincerely

Deepika Dugan

