

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. These 3 bills being considered by the Committee from what I understand will provide Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Indemnity Premium support to midwives, which is a wonderful achievement. However if these bills are passed into legislation in their current form, there will be no support, funding or indemnity for homebirth midwives. This will prevent midwives who provide homebirths, from registering and thus making their homebirth practice unlawful. This is of great importance to me and for all women and families who choose to bring a child into this world. Removing a fundamental choice of where women birth their babies is outrageous, especially in our society where we have access to information and can make a well educated and informed decision.

You may be wondering what all this fuss about, when there are 3 bills proposed which will assist midwives greatly and this is true. But let me point out there is a substantial difference between midwifery care being provided at home and in the hospital environment. This is why these bills are only halfway to achieving continuity of care. I am a registered midwife that has worked in the hospital setting. I have also experienced the joy of birthing our son at home with the guidance of a wonderful, very experience registered homebirth midwife. No matter how caring and supportive a midwife is in the hospital setting, there is the unfortunate reality that beds and staff are limited, which inevitable leads to a "get them in and get them out attitude". Why not leave hospital births for women that require this specialized care either physically or emotionally and support low risk women to birth as nature had intended, at home. With government cooperation we as a nation can give women the freedom to make an informed choice as to where they birth their babies while being safe, supported and protected. I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Medicare funding for midwifery care has been long overdue. Australia is totally out of step with many nations that have already taken the stand and support the rights of women to choose a homebirth. This is the time to make a difference to the future of Australian women's birthing rights, where is our freedom of choice.

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.

Yours sincerely

Tania Fechner