

July 8th 2009

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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.

As a mother who has experienced actual Birth Choice in the UK, I returned to Australia 5 years ago, and as I am now pregnant with my second child, I am horrified to find out that such basic human rights are scheduled not to be afforded to women in Australia. There is a myriad of evidence that supports Home birthing, with a midwife, as the safest, and most cost effective way to birth in low risk pregnancies.

By outlawing Homebirth with a private midwife, not only is the government endangering the lives of mothers and babies, as many whom have experienced the hospital system do not want to return to it, and are likely to free birth, unaided by a midwife or any antenatal care, or indeed to have costly (at the expense of Medicare) hospital births where a system of medical convenience will ensure that intervention, not only lengthens their births, but their stay in hospitals, as well as the health impacts on newborns.

While a home birthing option outsourced from a hospital base is afforded only to those in the locality of St Georges and Newcastle, my options in the Hills district of Sydney are so confined that my only option was a private midwife and homebirth, to provide the continuity of care and attention to detail that the hospital nor obstetric system does not offer. It really is a postcode lottery currently.

Thankfully, as I am a freelancer with no maternity leave or paid leave, my savings will pay for the support and knowledge of a practiced private midwife, many other women who deserve this option, are not even afforded this in the current climate. Banning Homebirths, seems to me to be a misguided step back to the dark ages, and puts Australia shamefully behind many 3rd world countries, as well as European benchmarks in this field who value midwifery, and women's rights, as well as ensuring a safe and gentle birth for the next generation of voters!

Yours sincerely
Sacha Walters