

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.

To single out midwives who practise homebirth and make their practice unlawful is discrimination when their care is perhaps the nearest to what the WHO recommends as safest care for well women. Continuity with a known carer, support, information, choice, promotion of nutrition and wellness and truly informed consent; all important contributors to health and strengthening of the family. When global midwifery research demonstrates findings for strong support of just this form of care, it would be a very backward step indeed for any legislation to be passed in a country which claims to support forward thinking health systems.

Women who choose homebirth as an alternative to hospital birth, will not abandon their rights to do so. If they are unable to secure a homebirth midwife to attend them illegally, I have been assured that they will indeed be free-birthing. Whilst the risk factor of homebirth is currently, small with a qualified and experienced practitioner in attendance, this is escalated enormously once that health practitioner is removed. I believe every woman has the right to choose safe maternity

care, but to have the safe element deliberately removed from a womans choice in homebirth through legislation, is a blatant breech of womens rights and a move that the government will need to be publicly answerable for in any undesirable outcomes

Yours sincerely

Pamela Grieger