

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 birthed my first child in a hospital in the U.K. I planned to birth her at home, but felt unsupported by the system there, so in we went. Her birth was fine. I had no complaints.

Then I birthed my son at home, in a pool in my own lounge room 2 years ago. I then saw that what I felt was fine, really wasn't. My son's birth was incredibly painful (a 3hr transition), but also spectacularly beautiful. I was in my own home, surrounded by my loved ones, and once he was born, I showered in my own shower, ate my own food, then went to sleep in my own bed with my new son, my partner and our daughter. I followed no one's agenda but my own, I felt safe, respected and comfortable the whole time. I chose to birth at home.

I would hate to think that for my next birth, this beautiful option would not be open to me. I would hate to think that women would not have a choice if they wanted it, to experience birth in their own home with a trained midwife. Because as I see it, those who have experienced home birth, or really desire to do so, will birth at home, but you will find more and more of them having to do it without a midwife. I will add now that I chose to birth my son without a midwife present (I am a midwife myself, although with lapsed registration), and while I am confident in my choice and felt we were well prepared, I am not sure others may be as well prepared.

Homebirth as it is practiced by the majority (with a trained midwife present) is a safe and gentle way to birth a baby. Removing a trained health professional would make it potentially unsafe, moving all births to the hospital setting would make birth not only unsafe(look at the statistics of mortality and morbidity in home and hospital births!), but also no longer gentle.

Allow women a safe choice. Allow midwives to attend birthing women in their own homes.

Yours sincerely

Linda Hutchinson-West