

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, all of which are countries that have better perinatal mortality and morbidity rates than our own.

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, while in The Netherlands almost 30% of women choose a homebirth, an action that leads them to have one of the lowest caesarean rates in the Western world.

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 also support a system where women are allowed to freely make their own choice about where they give birth and are not forced to do so in a place and manner that they find domineering, unable to be challenged and with an intervention rate that is frankly alarming.

While many people ignorantly consider homebirth to be unsafe, an unintended side effect of this bill we mean that women who plan to homebirth will almost certainly sometimes continue with their plans, but now without any professional help at all, an action that is without doubt unsafe. Homebirth with qualified midwives or doctors in attendance has been thoroughly proven by the highest possible evidence to be both as safe for mother and baby as birth in a hospital, and taking this choice away from women would truly be a sad day for Australia.

I have been formally registered as a midwife since 2006, and completed my three year degree with the sole intention of becoming a homebirth midwife. Although I have spent my time since then working and gaining experience in a hospital setting, it is one that I am finding increasingly distasteful and undemocratic, and thoroughly loathe the idea that I may be condemned to either work in this system until such time as the bill proposed to be passed is changed, or more likely, decide not to practise at all. I urge you to reconsider this bill and either exempt homebirth midwives from requiring indemnity insurance, or even better, insure them in order to comply with the proposed legislation.

Yours sincerely

Nina McLean RM