

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I am presently working as a hospital midwife but over the last 5 years more women have been seeking out a service to provide them with a birth at home. I trained in the UK, where home birthing is an acceptable practice and I chose to have my second child at home. At present

I have had the privilege to offer 6 women the choice to birth at home in the south west. I work in a tandem practice with another colleague so that I am able to offer this option. I have a good professional working relationship with the local GP Obstetrician who has provided me with medical back-up when a pregnancy or birth has become complicated.

At present in the South West of WA, around 35 women choose to birth at home with a Registered Midwife. Many others would like to birth at home, but simply cannot afford to do so. Women birthing at home in my area do so at their own expense (\$2500-\$3000), with no reimbursement from either Medicare or their Private Health Funds. If the choice to birth at home with an independent midwife is removed there will be an increase in the trend to 'free birth'. The choice to birth with an independent midwife at home will not be available to the community as of next July unless the two Bills currently before the Senate are amended to include homebirth.

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 or as part of community midwifery service which is Government funded.

In the country area, there is no birth centre or Government-funded 'Community Midwifery Program' so this reduces maternity care options in our community. Women are already severely restricted for choice, and if homebirth is "outlawed", then there will be no 'choice' at all other than to birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable 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 United Kingdom, women have a legislative right to choose a homebirth.

The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering to practice. Behaving in this manner it is inequitable

and discriminating. I thought Australia endorsed equal opportunity for all! I believe this could 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.

Women who choose to birth at home do not make such a decision lightly and are usually extremely well informed and take full responsibility for their health and that of their baby. Women who want to birth at home will continue to do so, only they may be forced to do so without a registered Midwife. This will of course lead to an increase in morbidity and mortality if they have to labour and birth without a Midwife there to monitor progress and the health of the mother and baby.

I support a health system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection as those women who choose to birth in hospital. Please endorse the rights and safety of all mothers and babies who have and will continue to choose to birth at home, as well as the Midwives who are ready, willing and able to support them in their choices.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely

Angela Jordan