

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills

I am writing to you about an issue that I could not be more passionate about. After the incredible home birth of my second son I am vocal and active at all and any opportunities to help more women have the experience I had. My birth was the most empowering, spiritual, amazing experience of my life and to cut a long story short it is greatly due to the care I received from my independent midwife. To hear that her career is in jeopardy is unbelievable to me when I feel that she deserves some sort of medal. Besides the wonderful continuity of care, that meant I had a friend birthing my child, the education she gave me included things that I know are not given in the hospital system (having had my first child in hospital.) I have 2 children and may in the future have more and it would give me a huge dilemma if attended home births were made illegal as my local hospital does not support home births and I would try to avoid a hospital birth at great lengths. I would not have an unattended birth as I know this to be dangerous. Some people assume that home births have unnecessary risks, but neither my midwife or myself were blase/unconcerned about any risks. The intervention rate and caesarean section statistics in Australian hospitals is, to my mind, disgusting. I talk to lots of women about my experience but would never ever suggest anyone had a home birth who wasn't comfortable with the idea, but I cannot believe that the Government intends to remove a woman's choice to birth in the comfort and safety of their own home and enjoy a birthing experience that they and their baby are entitled to.

I am concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal.

This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in

maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely and emphatically,

Laura Brooks