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Senator Moore  
Chair  
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation

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By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator,

**Re: Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills**

I am a mother of a 3 year old boy Max born at home in Bondi Junction. **Giving birth naturally at home was the most amazing empowering experience in my life.** My midwife assisted me carefully and professionally through this process. I strongly believe that other Australian women should have the option to choose a home birth and access the same exceptional care I enjoyed from my midwife.

I am very concerned by the 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.

My understanding is that these 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 attending 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. It would then be a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies.

This government's stated policy is to provide pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care. Why then are you looking to take away the very attractive option of home birthing?

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. Your proposed 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.

Global trends would indicate that homebirthing can and should be a positive and empowering option for a woman. In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands homebirth is publicly funded and supported. Why are we looking at going against this trend?

Please reconsider this legislation so that Australian women can 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

Susie Figgis