

Senator Moore
Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation

14 July 2009

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

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 a professional, 34 year old woman who is recovering from a recent miscarriage and hoping be a mother soon. I would like to have the option of a midwife-supported home birth available to me. From my friends' experiences, if I am at low risk, I would much rather give birth in a comfortable home environment with the support of a highly experienced midwife than in a hospital or birthing centre where:

- I am fortunate if there is space in our over-crowded system
- The risk of unnecessary intervention is high
- The experience is de-personalised because I am just one of a hundred women giving birth on that day

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, which I support, but they 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.

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