

14th July, 2009
Meghan Keleher

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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.

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.

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 view birthing as a normal physiological process that the body is well equipped for. So it was with those thoughts in mind that I made to the decision to pursue a homebirth for my first child. I am an educated woman and as a health professional have easy access to the research and literature. I spent much time educating myself on the safety of homebirth and options in childbirth. Fortunately I was living in Western Australia and had access to the community midwifery program. This enabled me the choice like all other women to establish my birth plan and have a back up hospital on hand. There are large amounts of research demonstrating the benefits of one on one midwife care during pregnancy and childbirth and having a homebirth with a private midwife enables this. It also adds safety by having a trained medical professional on hand to advise and act when safety is at risk.

Many women say to me that they cannot imagine having a baby at home; however there are also many women, myself included who cannot imagine having a baby in hospital. Just because hospital births are more common and considered the norm does not mean that the choice to birth at home safely should be taken away so easily and without repercussions. It is astonishing that the government so unashamedly disregarded the rights of thousands of women across Australia.

Yours sincerely
Meghan Keleher