

15 July, 2009
Melina Miles

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, and the impact that they will have on the ability of women to access a range of birthing options. I welcome the broadening of Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium to include support for midwives within the hospital system.

However, I am extremely concerned that the legislation, in its current form, excludes midwives who are working outside the hospital system – those providing care in a home environment. Of most concern to me is that, if passed, this legislation will make it illegal for a midwife to attend a woman who chooses to birth at home, and effectively removing homebirth as a choice for women in Australia. This would put Australia at odds with many other countries where private midwifery and homebirth is just one a range of options available to women.

In my own case I have two children. My son was born at home in January this year, and my experience with a private midwife through my pregnancy and birth could not have been more satisfactory. It was in stark contrast to my experience with a private obstetrician in the private hospital system four years earlier when I had my daughter.

I had never imagined that I would opt for a homebirth, I thought it was for crazies and hippies, and extremely high risk. I certainly wasn't a hippie or crazy; I am a professional with a PhD and live in a conservative regional town where I work in agricultural research. However, at 41, and with a 'history' of an assisted delivery for my first baby, I realized that I was at higher risk of intervention (and associated risk to myself and my baby) in the hospital system. Still somewhat wary of homebirth (essentially because it was so unfamiliar), but extremely relived that there was a non-hospital option, I opted to prepare with my midwife for a homebirth. The preparation was inclusive of my partner and my 4 year old daughter, was extensive and intensive.

I had two wonderful midwives present at the birth, which proceeded smoothly and naturally without any drama or trauma. Our family was able to stay together before, during and after the birth. I was not separated from my daughter and partner during or after the birth. The antenatal and post natal care I received from my midwife was exceptional, leaving me informed and extremely well prepared for the birth and caring for my new baby. The continuum from pregnancy to mother and baby was, in the home environment, just so normal and gentle. It seems unbelievable that this option is not accessible to all women who want it, and worse, is threatened by this legislation even for those who do have the choice to birth at home.

I am aware that this legislation and the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. As a consequence, it will be illegal for them to operate. I hope that this is actually an unintended consequence which had not been recognized in the formulation of the legislation, and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I am not a rabid supporter of homebirth *per se*, but am adamant that Australian women should have the choice to birth at home if they so choose, with the support of qualified and insured midwives, and with access to the same funding support as women who birth in a hospital environment. It is simply a question of equity and choice for women and their families.

Yours sincerely

Melina Miles

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