

14th July, 2009

Mrs Melissa Gonella

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 have had my three beautiful children at home and I would not choose to give birth anywhere else. I am saddened to think that in the future (unless a change is made to these bills) in order to birth at home I would need to put my life at risk by giving birth at home without health care professionals present (my beloved qualified midwives) because it would be illegal for them to attend birth at home.

Birthing my babies in the place of my choice was essential to me having a good outcome, hospitals make me nervous and it is a fact that nervous mothers do not birth well. This being the case, I wish to add that I am not against birthing in hospital and have been to hospital following one of my deliveries, I was happy to transfer to a hospital under the instruction of my midwives and they went with me, they stayed with me in a space that usually makes me nervous, which enabled me to relax more. If they were not with me I would not have known that I was out of a normal range of 'healthy mother'.

Within other countries where home birth is supported and funded by the government there is up to 30% of babies are born at home. The statistical peri natal outcomes of mothers and babies are excellent. Having this much of the population birth at home must take an extraordinary weight of their hospital systems.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. I want to remain to be able to choose to have my babies safely in my home. I believe to be able to birth safely in my home I need to have a fully qualified midwife

present and I wish for a system that allows me to choose a qualified midwife and not just some lay person without medical knowledge to be present during the most important day in my child's life.

Yours sincerely

Melissa Gonella