

15th July 2009
Kaggi Valentine

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 am a mother of two daughters aged 9 and 6, both of whom were born at home with 2 medically trained midwives, with considerable experience. I was healthy through my pregnancies and had regular monitoring and check ups with my care givers. What initially attracted me to homebirth was receiving continuity of care throughout my pregnancies, knowing who was going to be at my birth. I also knew that all being well I did want to birth naturally and I found that my midwives were fabulous at giving me information about natural ways of dealing with the pain of birth as well as instilling in me a confidence about my bodies natural ability to birth. I trusted them to let me know either beforehand, (should I have any medical needs arising during the pregnancy) or in the labour, through monitoring and assessment through their experience should we require more medical assistance. I felt safe and cared for by these women and also developed considerable psychological and practical resources through my pregnancy to be as prepared as possible for the "unknown" experience of birth. What I discovered birthing my first daughter was how marvelous an experience birth can be. Yes it was painful, yes it tested me to my limits but it also was incredibly empowering. I felt safe and supported at all times and my daughter was born alert and drug free and we had no problems with feeding or early parenting or bonding. I come from a country (U.K.) that has been increasing its homebirth availability for women and it is the norm among my peers, that if mum and baby is healthy then home birth is a valid and often preferred option. I strongly believe that all women and really by extension families should have access to care whether they

choose to birth at home, in a birth centre or hospital and consider myself very fortunate that we had the funds to pay for homebirth here, as I have several friends who would have like to have done so but did not feel able to meet the financial commitment. By the time my second daughter was born my independent midwives had lost their medical insurance. I considered myself very fortunate that they were so committed to helping women have the birth choices that they want that they continued to practice. I really urge you allow women access to medical care should they want to stay at home to birth their children.

Yours sincerely

Kaggi Valentine