

15/7/09  
Judith Russell

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee  
By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto: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.

***Personal Comments:***

**I am a registered midwife who has practiced in both home and hospital settings for over 25 years. Even though I no longer attend homebirths, I strongly support the right of women to continue to choose safe homebirth. Safety includes the attendance of a registered midwife. For many women, the choice to birth at home is such a priority that should a registered midwife not be available, they will choose to freebirth. Freebirthing means the woman is unattended by a registered health professional, a practice which exposes both mother and baby to unacceptable risks. If midwives are not able to legally attend homebirths, this practice will undoubtedly increase.**

**No matter where women choose to give birth, they have a right to safe, professional health care. This legislation will effectively remove that right.**

Yours sincerely

Judith Russell