

Anna Dawson

July 15th 2009

Ms Claire Moore
Chair, Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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. However, it is unacceptable 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 that enable women to safely birth at home with the support of qualified care-givers and provide efficient access to tertiary care when required. 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.

As the bill currently stands, Australian women will be forced to birth in environments they do not wish to birth in. Furthermore, such legislation could lead to some couples making potentially fatal decisions to birth at home without support. There is extensive evidence that birthing at home with the support of professionals is safe. This is not just some left wing hippy ideology. Pushing homebirth underground is a human rights violation, and should be considered an embarrassment for this "lucky country". The research community have demonstrated that this is a safe health care model, and the UK, Canada, New Zealand and The Netherlands have created health care models that recognize the evidence. We should not fall behind other developed countries with the introduction of such prohibitive legislation. This is important: please ensure this bill is changed to include private midwives attending women at home.

Yours sincerely

Anna Dawson