

Yewy Tan and Tim Mayberry

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

15 July 2009

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

We are aware of the recent reforms that are shaping Australia's maternity services. We understand that the Bills will enable long overdue Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women who give birth in hospital. On the whole, these are positive reforms that will benefit many Australian women and their families.

However, we would like to express our concern that the above bills exclude funding and indemnity arrangements for homebirth midwives and support for homebirth as a birthing option. By doing this, Australia is totally out of step with progressive 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 UK, 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. We 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.

Australia needs to support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. In the event of a medical emergency, there should be no difference in procedure whether a woman transfers from a maternity ward or from home. The presence of a trained professional midwife will ensure that for Australian families that choose to birth at home this remains a safe option. A collaborative and supportive relationship between families, midwives, obstetricians, GPs and hospital staff needs to be fostered. Legislation that enables freedom of choice of where to birth and who the primary care provider can be will ensure a transparent medical relationship, allowing for the safe delivery of all babies in Australia.

Loss of private midwives for homebirth is a problem for safety and choice.

- Homebirth is a reasonable option for women - shown by current evidence to be safe for low-risk births, available as a normal funded option in other developed countries, low cost.
- Some women will birth at home with an unregistered carer or no carer. Bad outcomes can be expected.
- Responsibility is not currently being accepted by either state or federal Government on this issue. (reference: www.maternitycoalition.org.au)

We urge the Senate to ensure that professional indemnity insurance exists for homebirth care in Australia. Women-centred continuity of care with a known midwife in a safe, supportive environment is an option that should be available to all women, whether they choose to birth in at home or in hospital. It does not make

sense to us that private homebirth midwives will be illegal in Australia when this maternity service is evidently successful and accepted in other developed countries.

Yours sincerely

Yewy Tan and Tim Mayberry

Proud Birth Centre parents of daughter Asha, 2.5 yrs

(and welcoming another little addition to the family in October 2009)