

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, and I am most grateful for this.

However, 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.

It is not acceptable to exclude homebirths attended by a private midwife from indemnity arrangements. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand. Evidence from these international and Australian homebirths shows clearly that homebirth is a reasonable choice for well women with a midwife primary carer who is able to refer to obstetric specialists if and when complications arise. Homebirths for well women also ease pressure on the health system and, based on my own experience of a homebirth, after two hospital births, provide so much more to the woman, baby and the whole family. I firmly believe that I have avoided interventions during my last birth purely by virtue of giving birth at home and thanks to being cared for by a midwife, my baby was safe at all times.

I would hate for Australia to become a country where maternity care is led by obstetricians. Obstetricians do not practise midwifery; midwives do not practise obstetrics. The midwife has, by definition, a duty to promote normal birth. The obstetrician is a highly skilled surgeon, who should be consulted only if illness or complications arise in pregnancy or birth, as is the case with any other medical specialty.

I want my daughter to have this option – safely. Please address this issue as a matter of urgency.

Your sincerely

Nikoleta Tomecko