

15 July 2009

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.

The closest private practice midwives to where I live are over 2 hours drive away. There are midwives in the local area that would provide homebirth services if insurance was available. These midwives are tired of the constraints of the hospital system and are distressed by the way women are treated in the hospital system, that is lack of continuity and "production line" maternity care. Basically, lack of a choice. Some women are driving over 2 hours away to other bigger hospitals as well as for homebirths in the homes of family and friends in those areas.

The women are going to these efforts so that they can access the care they want, where they feel safe. Most concerning for me, is that in my local area, there have been 2 "free births" in the past 12 months, simply because women have been unable to access private practice midwives due to the current lack of private indemnity insurance for midwives and real choices for rural women.

Limiting homebirth services in the current situation is forcing women into unsafe situations. If homebirth becomes illegal, I worry that these women will "go underground", even more so than they do all ready. Basically, due to not having a choice. The choice of homebirth must be offered to all women, in all parts of Australia, for now and for the future.

Yours sincerely
C. Greenwood