

15 July, 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 am thrilled that Australia is at last proposing bills which 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.

Home birthing has long been a misunderstood subject in our society. Whilst other nations have embraced home birth, Australia had shut its eyes to the overwhelming empirical evidence, which documents both the safety of home birth and the improved “mental health” (for want of a better term) outcomes for the mothers, compared to birth in hospitals.

The intersection of this proposed 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.

I write this submission as a citizen of this country and also as the mother of five more of its citizens. Each of these five children was cared for *in utero* by wonderful, professional midwives and four of them entered the world in the safe and loving environment of our own home. As a couple with tertiary qualifications, my husband and I did not enter into this decision lightly. We made this choice after much reading about all options available to us, including the one most difficult of all to access here in Australia (home birth). We also then interviewed our prospective midwives to ensure they were sufficiently skilled and suitably cautious regarding any problems that may occur. Their competence and professionalism has made us proud & vocal supporters of their profession.

I ask that you ensure that all Australian families are given EVERY choice in the manner in which they seek to care for their child during the antenatal, birth and postnatal periods – including publicly funded home births, with all the associated support that the midwives need and deserve, including access to the PBS and professional indemnity premium support.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Samantha Bryan