

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
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 am writing to you out of deep concern for the changes proposed to outlaw homebirth in Australia. (Please find attached full details from the Maternity Coalition)

As a first-time pregnant woman I have recently been researching many aspects of birth and parenting as I see parenthood as the most important role I will perform in my life to date and I want to give all that I can to nurture, love and care for my coming baby. This starts from birth, therefore the birth process is of great importance. As such it was not with reverence that I explored birth options, and after serious consideration my partner and I decided upon a homebirth supported by an experienced and grounded midwife as we believe that no other environment could provide an equally positive, safe and supportive atmosphere.

Initially it was disappointing enough to learn that homebirth is not covered by Medicare in Queensland (most other states have programs allowing public cover for homebirth, albeit restricted) but to then learn that the government proposes to *outlaw* homebirth was an absolute shock. This constitutes an abuse of my right as a woman and human being to make an informed decision as to what is right for my family's circumstances. To *force* all women to birth in a sterilized, hospital environment is simply outrageous. The increase of medicalised births to me is frightening let alone a huge cost to society - not only in the use of hospital beds, but for medications which under different circumstances such as in a relaxed environment are likely to be unnecessary, let alone the psychological impact on women who can feel that the natural process of birth is taken out of their control in a hospital environment and can suffer mental anguish and unrest for years to come.

I also find this an alarming route to take for a developed nation as it is a huge step backwards, a step back to prohibiting freedom of choice, of not respecting human differences and circumstances, and of not trusting people to be able to make informed decisions for their own and their family's wellbeing. Given the rich diversity of our society - culturally, spiritually, educationally - how is it

logically possible for one scenario - a hospital birth - to suit all??? Surely we would be better off to listen and learn from our sisters and brothers in other nations, some would suggest nations more advanced socially, medically and economically than ours like The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK and actually improve services to support homebirth as they do.

Furthermore today it is common knowledge that prohibition does not work - just look at rising rates of drug abuse. I find it deeply concerning that should this legislation be ratified, there will be an increase in the unsafe practice of 'freebirthing', ie. where a woman births at home without the assistance of an experienced and qualified professional. Whilst data is unreliable it is clear that this practice occurs in Australia of unknown numbers or impacts. But given that one of the (flawed) arguments against homebirthing is that it is dangerous to the health of the newborn I think it is plausible to consider that in a freebirth scenario, the total absence of a professional attendant is likely to result in even higher risks to mother and child. Ultimately the long term health costs in these cases would then fall under the public health purse strings, being a cost to all Australians.

What we need is freedom of *quality* information on when and why homebirth is a safe and valid birthing option. And then offer the necessary support, ie. assistance in gaining professional indemnity insurance, to the midwives who offer this vital and valid service to the community. I urge you Ms Moore to please protect our civil rights and NOT allow homebirth to be banned.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Hogg