

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.

Last year my husband and I welcomed our first child, born at home. We were attended by an extremely capable and knowledgeable independent midwife. The labour and birth progressed smoothly and calmly, and I feel that this was largely due to my being in my own home, where I felt relaxed and safe. I also felt very supported by a midwife who I had come to know well during my pregnancy. Of the many women I have met over the past year who gave birth at a similar time, mine is one of the few that would be considered a positive birth experience. Most of the other women gave birth in hospital.

I feel deeply concerned and fearful that the government is making this move to take away the right of women and their families to choose the most appropriate birth situation for them. For many women birth is a significant and sacred event in their lives, and while there are some births that require medical attention, they are in the minority. It seems to me unjustifiable for the government to take away choices regarding such an important event for women, their families and their newborn babies.

I urge you to consider the proposed legislation carefully, with accurate information as to the safety and viability of homebirth, and with consideration and respect for women's right and ability to make choices that she considers are safest and most nurturing for her and her family.

Yours sincerely

Meredith McKay