

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills.

Being the father of 2 home-birthered sons now 7 and 1, and seeing both of them being birthered into a warm, safe, loving and peaceful environment, and both physically and psychologically healthy, I cannot imagine birth to be any other way. Prior to our first child we had no preference, however when we researched our options, read many books by respected authors such as Sheila Kitzinger and Michel Odent, watched films such as "What Babies Want" and "The Business of Being Born", the only difficulty in our choice of homebirth was finding a midwife. Thankfully we found 2 amazing midwives who extended a level of care to my wife that was nothing short of extraordinary. Months before birth they built a level of intimacy with my wife so that 'on the day' she was totally comfortable in their presence and could completely relax into her labour. Needless to say both births were amazing to experience and the bonding between us as a family receives comment from many people including school.

I am concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

This is draconian legislation and is not even mirrored by the most 'medicalised' country such as the USA.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

To quote a family therapist who I know personally, "As a psychologist I regularly treat mothers and occasionally fathers who are traumatized by 'normal' obstetric procedures in labour wards - with dire consequences for the whole family and especially for the child. The psychological scars of birth trauma can last a lifetime (behaviour problems, etc)." Are we to condemn a generation of our children to this ongoing psychological burden simply because we refuse to offer insurance to midwives?

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this

practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth.

I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. Removing a woman's right to choose the location of her most fundamental 'rite of passage' is a disgrace in a modern western democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely,

John Broadbent