

Dear Senator,

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

I am a mother of 3 children aged 8, 7 and 4. After 2 hospital births I decided to birth my 3rd child at home. While my first 2 births were relatively intervention free i was left feeling disempowered and manipulated. I believe the high intervention rate in hospitals is why we have such a high rate of post natal depression in the West. While in hospital, although I was ecstatic to meet and get to know my baby, I couldn't shake a feeling of shame. For my third I planned a home birth. My husband wasn't happy about spending \$3000 on an independant midwife when our hospital births cost us nothing. I spent the first 6 months of my pregnancy managing it myself while i tried to convince my husband to employ a midwife and that the safest place for me to birth was where I felt safest, at home. Eventually he agreed. As it turned out, in the privacy of my home was the safest most natural place for me to birth. As soon as my husband popped out for supplys, I birthed my baby on my own with passion, power and dignity. Birthing is a most intimate sensual experience, and this is inhibited by the presence of strangers and strange places. I truly believe that home is the safest place for me to birth, no mammal should be moved and observed while performing on of lifes most precious sensual experiences. Please ensure women can continue to chose to birth with dignity and power.

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.

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.

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. This is an absurd situation in a modern 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,

Melissa Gray