

16 July 2009

Ms Claire Moore, Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Submitted by E-mail to: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto: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 making this submission to the Inquiry to express my concern about these Bills. I am a mother of three children: two born in the public health system, and one born at home under the individual care of an independent midwife. I am also a childbirth support doula, and therefore believe that I can comment on these Bills from the perspective of both a consumer and a professional in the maternity care system.

I understand that the 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, and I acknowledge the importance of this development in the health care landscape.

However, it is not acceptable 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, countries that have demonstrated excellent maternity care systems. 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. The Bills recognise the professional standing of midwives, but effectively prohibit independent midwives from practicing their profession. By doing so, a situation of inequity of access and funding is created; this is unacceptable, and I look to this inquiry to address this consequence.

Yours sincerely

Sarah O'Brien