

Senator Moore
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation

14 July, 2009

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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 the mother of one son born last November at The Royal Hospital for Women. Although I had a lovely birth experience in hospital, I can say that my experience was made so positive by the particular midwife who attended me at the birth centre. If I would have had a midwife with a different philosophy or someone who I did not feel as comfortable with, I can't say that my outcome would have been as positive due to the circumstances which surrounded my son's birth.

In hospital, the midwife who attends you at birth is a bit of a potluck. Women enter hospital not knowing who will be with them on the day and, even though changes are being made to increase continuity of care, it is still very substandard in comparison to the type of care that a woman receive with an independent midwife. Independent midwives serve women in the place where they are most comfortable, home. You know from the start of your pregnancy who will be with you at the birth and not only are they with you, but they take time to be with you. Speaking to friends who have had the pleasure of hiring an independent homebirth midwife, their midwives spend up to and sometimes longer than an hour with them each visit and the midwife is with them through the entire birthing process. Unlike in hospital, they only have one woman to attend to, not several women. And after the birth, they visit the family up to two weeks following the baby's birth. When hiring an independent midwife, you can choose your caregiver and interview them to make sure that their experience as well as their personality is a good match for your family.

To think that the Australian government would even have on the table legislation that would make such a beautiful choice a crime, is a travesty and a disgrace. We should instead have on the table policy that would make this service more accessible to more women. We live in a democratic society where women's rights are just that a right to choose what is in the best interest of women and their families. I would sincerely hope that you would consider that a place of birth is not a crime, but merely a choice. Indeed, it would be far more criminal of the government to take away this choice and risk the possibility that women will choose to give birth at home anyway, putting many more lives at risk.

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
Edwina Johnson