

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.

It seems unjust and unwise that we will see a situation where a woman can choose to have a caesarean without any medical reason, yet it will not be legal for women such as myself to choose a simple birth at home in the presence of qualified professionals.

My daughter who is now two years old was born at home and my second child is due next month and (unless complications arise) will also be born at home with the same midwives who attended the birth of my daughter. There are many reasons why this is the only choice for me. There is nothing more important to my husband and myself than our children and this means that we want the best start possible for them. I choose home birth because it is the safest option available to me as a healthy robust woman. It optimises my ability to birth my children safely and normally, the way nature intended. I would not feel comfortable in any other environment unless there was a need for medical intervention. It is well documented that women need to feel comfortable and unobserved in order for birth to go well. I do not want strangers present during the labour

and birth unless there is a medical need. I do not want to expose my baby to the germs and diseases present in hospitals if it is not necessary to do so. The intervention rates in hospital are extremely high and the risks to my baby associated with these interventions are unacceptable to me unless due to true medical need. I don't want a baby born under the influence of drugs. I want to avoid the increased risk of death, post natal depression and breast-feeding failure associated with cesarean. If possible I want to avoid the increased risk of fetal distress and operative birth associated with induction and epidural. Is this really so hard for people to understand? The birth of my baby is a magical moment that takes place in the heart of our family life. It is not a medical procedure. For this reason it must be at home.

Please understand that I could list many more personal reasons why this option must remain available to Australian women, however I have come to the sad realisation that those who have not witnessed the wonder of birth at home may never understand why it is so important. I have never felt marginalised or discriminated against in this way at any other stage in my life. Contrary to the inaccurate portrayal of women who choose home birth, I do not shun hospitals and medical technology, I am not a 'refugee of the hospital system', I am not an incense-burning hippy or a militant feminist. When someone in my family is sick we go to the doctor for treatment. But I am not sick, I am a healthy woman who simply wants a normal natural birth in my own home with a care provider of my choice. Even if none of this strikes a chord with the committee, I ask you to consider the basic rights of women in Australia. Offer me the same freedom that the woman who chooses an elective caesarean possesses. To take away the liberty of a group simply because they are small in number and make a different choice to the majority is discrimination at its worse and is in contrast to the ideals of this country.

Yours sincerely,

Chloe Lee