

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I am writing to you to state my concerns about the above bills. I understand and embrace the fact that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the PBS and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women who choose to give birth in hospital. This is a great step and will go a long way to provide support for midwives and allowing them to continue to practice. The importance of midwives attending births has long been noted.

What concerns me the most, however, is the exclusion of homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. If the government agrees to pass this bill, it will essentially make homebirthing illegal, and therefore cut off a valuable avenue of choice for many Australian women. Nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand support homebirthing as a valid option, as well as providing public funding for women to chose a registered midwife to attend them. In countries such as the Netherlands, there almost two-thirds of births are at home, the infant and mother mortality rate is significantly lower than those of Australia and the United states, both countries where midwifery and homebirthing are not as strongly supported.

If I may take a moment to relay my own story. As a qualified naturopath, I have always been aware of alternatives to common medical practices, and homebirthing was, as far as I could glean from my research, considered a viable, safe, and even desired alternative to a hospital birth, when attended by a qualified midwife, and provided the mother was a low risk candidate. When I fell pregnant myself, I immediately set out to determine whether I was a low risk candidate, as I also wanted a homebirth. Long term studies and statistics have shown, as I stated above, that it is just as safe if not safer than hospital births. Also the rates of interventions (medications, assisted deliveries, need for pain relief etc) are considerably lower. (I would turn your attention to this article <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/homebirthissues.asp> which contains excellent information as well as references to individual studies at the end)

Having contacted a local private midwife, who after the assessment of a doctor, agreed that I was an excellent candidate as I was in good health, I then hired her on for the majority of my pre and post-natal care. The care I received from her was professional, friendly, and at all times I felt I was in excellent hands. When I finally went into labour, my midwife was with me the entire time, constantly monitoring the baby's heartbeat, checking my progress, and so on. I felt totally relaxed at home, comfortable in my environment, and was allowed the time to labour as I could. After over 24 hours, it became apparent that my baby was not turned around fully and was not progressing as fast as she liked down the birth canal. Immediately she contacted the hospital, even though it wasn't strictly an emergency, and advised that I transfer. She was not willing to

take any risks that involved a mother and child, a commendable attitude for any professional. She remained with me throughout the next day until I gave birth to my son.

While in the hospital, my husband and I felt as though matters were constantly being taken out of our hands, we felt helpless, and hopeless. It was only the presence of my midwife that kept me going and didn't allow me to give into the doctor's callous assessment that I "Might as well have an epidural now for your C-section later, as there's almost no way you will birth this child on your own." I might add that a C-section is major surgery, which takes a very long time to recover from, invites infections such as golden staph, and interferes with mother and child bonding as well as breastfeeding. Australia's current rate for C-sections is around 30%-40% - phenomenally higher than the WHO's current recommendation of no more than 3%-5%. Thankfully, with her and my family's support, I was able to birth naturally, with no complications.

Once we went home, my midwife continued to visit me daily, giving me support in establishing breastfeeding, aftercare, and generally being supportive and helpful. I wouldn't have gotten through those first weeks without the excellent support I received.

I cannot speak for every Australian woman. I can only speak for myself when I state that at no time under my midwife's care did I feel that I was in any danger, or that any decisions she made were for anything other than my absolute care and health. I have absolutely no hesitations in homebirthing again, even though it ended at the hospital. I am saddened, frustrated, and even horrified that our government would consider making such changes as would prevent me from birthing my children that way, and the place, I choose. Even if I was told today that I can never have another homebirth due to medical reasons, I would not stop fighting for that right for other women, and my daughters. Surely, as an advanced and modern country we would never consider passing such a legislation.

What of those women whose religion does not allow them to give birth in a hospital? Are they now to be considered criminals, and denied the excellent care they deserve? What of women such as my own mother, who, when in labour with me, entered the hospital where she had been so badly treated during her previous birth, and the stress of the situation caused labour to stop for over three weeks? Why aren't we supporting, and even funding, private midwifery which provides superior care to women, and saves the government and hospitals money?

It would be impossible for me to completely divorce myself from the emotion of this issue, as it is very close to my heart, and affects me personally, as I want to have more children. But I would ask that you would look into the facts, which, devoid of emotion, tell the tale as it should. Ignorance and scaremongering are no excuse to allow legislation such as this to pass!!

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.

Yours sincerely

Helen McGuire N.D.