

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.

The birth of my daughter 2 years ago was in hospital. Next time I would like access to an Independent Midwife so that I can have my baby safely at home.

I would like to tell you about my hospital experience in July 2007. Firstly, I was sent home 3 times, which meant I was travelling buckled into the car for a total of an hour, waiting in the waiting room of the hospital for another hour, waiting in the examination room for another hour - so it was 3 hours before I was able to go into the birthing suite and receive some support.

Once in the birthing suite I did not encounter the type of support I was after. The first midwife who attended me never touched me, rather she stood a few meters away and told me "if you want an epidural to manage the pain, you better have one now, because the anesthetist won't be back until the morning". She never offered me any alternatives. I gave in and accepted that this was how it was. A cold, heartless environment where what's on offer is drugs, surgery and a hard uncomfortable bed for you to lay on.

After I was given the epidural, I lay there for another 20 hours. I "asked" for the epidural too early apparently which essentially stopped my labor progressing, not to mention being in the worst labouring position possible, flat on my back. I was given drugs to speed up the contractions which helped a little, but not enough. In the end I'd been in the birthing suite too long, other women were waiting and they had given up on me having a natural birth. This is the only reason I was then wheeled off for a caesarean. My baby and I were both doing fine, just not fitting into their time schedule.

The caesarean was terrifying. I lost quite a lot of blood and my baby encountered being handled roughly from the moment she was pulled from my stomach. Trying to care for my baby with little help and lots of drugs in my system in the days following was horrible. Including waiting up to an hour sometimes for assistance to get out of my bed to go to the toilet. Sometimes so I could simply get up to reach my crying child. A couple of times the woman I shared my room with whom was recovering better than I would help me get out of bed instead.

Out of hospital I had reoccurring dreams of my experience, developed Post Natal Depression and stopped breastfeeding my daughter as a result. Each day I look at her and feel so grateful that we were able to come out of the experience alive and well. It seemed a dark cloud hung over us for more than a year afterwards and only now is it clearing.

Why am I telling you this? To express just how passionate I am about not having to go through that same experience again. With the assistance of an Independent Midwife I can birth in my own home, at my own pace, safely and with as much support and natural pain relief options as I like. And as we only live 15 minutes away, should I need surgery, we can call ahead and be in surgery quicker than the 40 minutes it was that I waited to get into theater for the first. This alternative I believe its many times safer than a repeat of last time.

It is in the best interest of many Australian women that you do not make homebirth illegal. Please don't take away this choice.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Turner