

Thursday 16th July 2009

Sarah Beale

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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.

I was lucky enough (and I say lucky intentionally as I believe the system as it currently exists relies heavily on the birthing woman's knowledge, confidence in dealing with health professionals and single mindedness when it comes to how she wants to birth her baby) to be able to birth my first child at home last year with a midwife. I assumed that all my future children would enter the world in the comfort of our home environment, with the health professional of my choosing and in a totally uninterrupted and natural way.

To put things into perspective from an economic point of view, my child's birth not only freed up a hospital bed for a woman who needed it/chose it but I did not visit a hospital for any antenatal appointments; used no costly pharmaceutical pain relief, only the warm water to fill the birthing pool which I borrowed from my midwife at no public cost; did not require stitches or any other post birth treatment aside from toast and a much needed cup of tea at my own expense!; did not require the services of a lactation consultant, pediatrician etc.

My baby was allowed to enter the world in her own time without the interruptions of constant monitoring and checking which can so often slow down labour and mean further unnecessary interventions. My confidence in my midwife and hers in me meant that my body had the opportunity to do what it is actually 'programmed' to do and I was able to totally relax into the

experience and even enjoy it – this also meant that my support people were free to do what they were there to do (look after me!!) and all who were involved look back on the event with excitement, satisfaction and anticipation of the next time!

I am incredibly saddened and, to be honest, scared, that my experience is unlikely to be repeated with the birth of any subsequent children and I that I may have to consider the possibility that my next (as yet unconceived) child will not be born in the environment and with the midwife of my choosing. I am angry that birthing women will continue to have to fight with hospitals, argue with health professionals and protest to be heard and I am disappointed that what should have been such a positive outcome for Australian women, their children and families is thus far falling far short.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Beale