

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Moore

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

I write as a midwife to express my concern about the above bills. I am thrilled 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. It will allow me a more complete scope of practice as a hospital based midwife.

I feel, however, that it is unacceptable to exclude community based homebirth midwives from this funding and indemnity arrangement. The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering: a dreadful loss of skill and knowledge to the profession and a shameful loss of choice for women.

By doing this, Australia will fall behind nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand - nations that support the right of women to choose homebirth and to have a registered midwife funded through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth: do Australian women deserve less? I wonder what will become of the women who will still choose to birth at home, but will be unable to legally employ a qualified midwife to care for them. Surely it is a matter of public safety that these women are not denied proper care, and are not left to birth alone or with unqualified (and unregulated) attendants?

It is not enough to say "homebirth per se will not be illegal...hospital run community models of care may have a home birth practice" as these models do not exist in Victoria, and in fact there are very few in Australia. I have not seen any evidence from the Australian Nurses Federation, Nurses Board of Victoria, or public health care of moving toward home birthing. Where are the viable alternatives?

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. I ask that you take steps to include homebirth with a community-based midwife within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca
Rebecca Hart, Midwife & Mother