

16<sup>th</sup> July, 2009

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee  
By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto: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 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.

As a homebirth mum of two boys, and also a midwife who works part time in the area of homebirth, I could provide you with many stories of how wonderful and empowering and safe my births were, and of how I practice using research based evidence. I could also direct you to many studies that show that homebirth is indeed a safe option for many women, and that it would be foolish for the government to cut off this option for women wanting to birth outside the hospital system.

Instead I will say this. In July 2010 we will have one of the most ridiculous scenarios you could ever imagine, and it will be played out in our state, and across the country. A well healthy woman with no risk factors and no medical or physical reason will be able to walk into a public hospital and demand a Caesarean section for the birth of her baby. She will be

able to have this procedure for free, and the government and tax payers will foot the bill. Women will also have access to government and tax-payer funded abortion, up to 22 weeks of pregnancy without needing a medical reason. These women will also be able to access the government's baby bonus payment. I am not arguing that this shouldn't be the case, just that it seems bizarre to me that these women will be funded out of taxpayer's pockets, and yet it will be ILLEGAL to have your baby at home with an independent midwife.

Please consider that this decision to remove a woman's fundamental right to choose where and with whom she births, will have long ranging effects and ramifications, not just for those women who wish to birth at home, but for the many midwives who have dedicated their lives to working in the true sense of the meaning of midwifery, that is 'with women'.

Yours sincerely

Tania Smallwood.