

16th July 2009

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 understand that on 25 June 2009 the Senate, on the recommendation of the Selection of Bills Committee, referred the provisions of the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 7 August 2009.

Please accept this letter as a submission relating to this inquiry.

The following paragraphs are essentially those from the Homebirth Network of South Australia, and they sum up the main points I wish to make concerning this Bill. I agree wholeheartedly with them, and have decided to use their wording rather than attempt to restate in my own wording. I have included my own personal viewpoint at the conclusion of this submission, and thank you in advance for considering my views.

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.

Lastly, to sum up, I am very concerned that private midwives may effectively be prohibited from conducting their business in the homes of their clients, ie. assisting in the care of women (and their babies) who wish to birth their babies within their own homes. I support changes to legislation that results in private midwives being able to continue to practice as they have been in Australia, ie. retain the status quo.

I am a forty year old, tertiary educated, mother of two young children, aged 4 and 2, and have a personal interest in this issue. My husband and I paid for the services of an independent midwife to assist with the birth of our second son in 2006. This included visits from the midwife (and a back-

up midwife) in our own home throughout the pregnancy, labour and post-natal period. We both feel that this was the best choice for us after a less than satisfactory experience with the birth of our first son who was born by “emergency caesarean section” in a private hospital. The two births although both ending in the same visible product – healthy baby boys, were worlds apart to me and my husband, our relationship with our babies, and each other.

I suspect I was part of the "increase in Emergency C/Section rate" due to 'an obligation ...to intervene very quickly' whilst under the private hospital system of care for the birth of our first son. In the case of our second birth, I was one of those transfers to hospital – however having an attempted planned homebirth did not threaten my baby or my own life to the extent that some people would make it seem. In my case, the time from arrival at hospital with my midwife to actual "Emergency C/Section" operation was 3hrs. I was never in any doubt that I was under the best possible care, with my midwife, who detected complications early enough to allow safe transfer to hospital.

If I had another pregnancy, I would choose to have another go at a homebirth – however, it seems that this option may be taken away from me, unless changes are made to the proposed legislation.

Amendments to the Bill claim to “...*deliver key components of the maternity reform package, which responds to the Maternity Services Review... Nearly all of the women who participated in the Review expressed frustration at the limited options available to them, and called for midwifery models of care that provide continuity of care, over the spectrum of antenatal, birthing and postnatal services*”. I was one of those who participated and I wrote singing the praises of independent midwives, and asking that they be more accessible. I didn't expect to be writing again now, begging that the home birth midwifery model of care be kept as an option for expectant parents, and not be made illegal.

I ask you to ensure that homebirth with private midwives remains legal in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Baulderstone