

16 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 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.

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.

All women need to have access to one-to-one care with a known midwife, at home or in hospital. Homebirth has been proven to be as safe, or safer, than hospital birth for many women. But that is not the issue here. (The South Australian State government funds homebirth programs already). The issue is my right to choose my care provider, my place of birth, what happens to my body. Birth is not a medical event in most cases.

Last year I had a homebirth after caesarean (HBAC). My registered private midwife is an expert in normal birth. When the birth was not progressing as she or I had hoped, we discussed transfer to hospital, before the situation got serious. As we were deciding whether or not to go, my son moved into a better position, and was born easily. The proposed changes have meant my husband and I have brought forward our plan for another baby, and now hope to conceive in the next three months. I WILL NOT go to hospital for a routine, normal birth. If my option to have a registered midwife in private practice is taken away from me, I will seriously consider not having another baby. This is very sad for me, but a caesarean section is not an ideal way to birth a baby, and having had a previous caesarean, it is unlikely that I would be fully supported to have a vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) in hospital. VBAC is proven safer for most mothers and babies than repeat caesarean section.

The interventions and medical treatment available in hospital have saved many lives. I would not hesitate to go to hospital if it was in my or my baby's best interest. Having a homebirth is not just about a loving, joyous experience! It's also about the best outcome for me and the baby, physically and emotionally. It's also about establishing and maintaining a good breastfeeding relationship. It's about staying out of hospital and saving tax payer money for patients who need it.

Ultimately, it is my body! It is my choice! And I want to choose to birth at home with a registered midwife in private practice.

Yours sincerely

Michelle How