

Attention: Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on
Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

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

17th July, 2009

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 am writing my own feelings to you in what I feel are from desperation. I am a birthing consumer and a mother of 7 children who has been highly active in my birthing communities and networks over the last 26 years. I feel strongly about mine and my daughters' right to give birth with a known and trusted midwife in private practice if we so choose. I am very passionate about supporting women in giving birth wherever they choose and with a care provider of their choice. I have supported many women in the private and public systems as well as at home, always with a professional Obstetrician or Midwife or Midwives in Private Practice. I am not medically trained; I am a support person for the woman and her partner. Birth isn't just about the physical action of giving birth; I support women physically, emotionally and with informational and educational support.

I am not a government, legal, medical or insurance expert, I just have to tell you that it matters to me, to my family, my four daughters and all women who have chosen homebirth for their previous babies and who are planning more babies. I am currently supporting and listening to women who are desperately trying to get pregnant and birth their babies before 1 July 2010. I find it absolutely ridiculous that they are left to feel this pressure and uncertainty.

I birthed my last baby at home, I would like to have this choice in the future and so do my daughters! I believe that regardless of where you choose to birth, other women shouldn't

have that choice taken away.

Imagine if women couldn't request epidurals! Yet they are willing to take away homebirth midwives as an option!

Women who engage a MIPP do so out of their own pocket, they are not burdening tax payers, they are taking pressure off of the system and they also take personal responsibility for their well researched and informed decisions.

I just cannot believe that the Australian Government can squash a whole profession.

Homebirth with a MIPP is not an issue of safety or the Government would not allow homebirth programs to run out of our Public Hospitals, would they?

I live very close to our major Women's and Children's Hospital yet I would not fit the strict criteria this limited program is offering due to the number of children I have already successfully and naturally given birth to – yes the good old "proven pelvis" – yet unknown 1st time Mothers are allowed onto the program, this doesn't make sense to many of us. I understand it's a low risk model and we all understand homebirth is not for everyone. There are always going to be a few women who prefer to homebirth and do what is their right to do with their own bodies. How dare the government tell us how to deal with a normal physiological event such as giving birth. Does the Australian Government take notice of our World Health Organisation recommendations?

Many women I have spoken to have stated that:

If forced to go into hospital because of the changes to homebirthing, we will be a large group of unwilling "patients". We will be questioning every decision and attempting to stop any "routine" intervention. We will be noisy as we reject epidurals and flee scheduled appointments as we reject inductions.

This would probably be very bad for morale of hospital staff. If you were running a hospital, would you like to be dealing with this?

I have also been told by some people in power jobs that the states of South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland will not support an exemption re: indemnity being mandatory, it's been heard to have been said 'over our dead bodies' – how dare these decisions be made for us in this manner – where is the consultation? Nobody sent me a letter re: changes to legislation – this has all been conducted without consultation with the people who matter, this is my body you are trying to control.

I think you will see dead bodies! It's a sad state of affairs that some women will be so traumatised to trust the system again that they'd rather birth their babies at home – a term called 'freebirthing' without a good trusted medical professional such as a midwife in private practice.

I am requesting that an exemption be made for Midwives in Private Practice to require indemnity insurance (given they've already been practicing without it for 8 years), or for the government to subsidise insurance for Midwives providing private homebirth as they do for other groups of care providers.

**Mother of Seven Little Australian's
Helen Hriskin**