

Friends of the Birth Centre
PO BOX 93,
The Grange, Q, 4051

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

Friends of the Birth Centre (FBC) is a not-for-profit association that supports and advocates for improved maternity services. We would like to express our concern about the above bills. FBC understands 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. FBC believes 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.

FBC supports a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

FBC believes that for women, knowing where and with whom they will birth is a vital element to feeling safe. Privacy and intimacy is critical. Feeling safe allows the hormones of childbirth to do their work in as unhindered a fashion as possible - leaving mothers and couples as intact as possible. Good outcomes use fewer resources, not more.

In the event of a medical emergency FBC believes that whether a woman transitions from a Birth Centre or from home there should be no difference in procedure. The presence of a trained professional midwife will ensure that for Australian families that choose to birth at home this remains a safe option. A collaborative and supportive relationship between families, Midwives, Obstetricians, General Practitioners and hospital staff needs to be fostered. Legislation that enables freedom of choice of where to birth will ensure a transparent medical relationship, allowing for the safe delivery of all babies in Australia.

Loss of private midwives for homebirth is a problem for safety and choice.

- Homebirth is a reasonable option for women - shown by current evidence to be safe for low-risk births, available as a normal funded option in other developed countries, low cost.
- State services cannot be expected to provide broadly accessible homebirth services in the foreseeable future.
- Women will not have the choice to birth at home with a registered caregiver.
- Some women will birth at home with an unregistered carer or no carer. Bad outcomes can be expected.
- Responsibility is not currently being accepted by either level of Government.
(reference: www.maternitycoalition.org.au)

We urge the Senate to ensure that professional indemnity insurance exists for homebirth care in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Bonny Marsh (President - Friends of the Birth Centre {QLD})