

Friends of the Mackay Birth Centre
PO Box 179
Mackay
QLD 4740

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

Friends of the Mackay Birth Centre (FMBC) is a not-for-profit, community group that exists to support the families who use the Mackay Birth Centre service and the midwives and the pregnancy and birth care philosophies of the Mackay Birth Centre.

We are writing to express our concern about the above-mentioned Bills. We understand that the Bills, as proposed, will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women who give birth in hospital, but not for midwives providing homebirth care.

FMBC understands that, under the proposals, Medicare funding will only be available to midwives in private practice who are registered on the National Register for Health Practitioners (to come into force in July next year). Furthermore, in order to register, a practitioner must have professional indemnity insurance and the proposed Commonwealth-supported professional indemnity cover will not respond to claims relating to homebirth. Consequently, from July 2010, should the proposals be enacted, birth care at home will be outside terms of insurance for registered midwives, and thus potentially subject to disciplinary action by the midwifery professional regulator.

FMBC supports full CHOICE in pregnancy and birth care and is passionate about the benefits of midwifery-led care. Pregnancy and birth care with a known midwife is proven to be very safe and cost effective for low risk women, whether they choose to birth in a birth centre or at home.

In New Zealand and the U.K. women have a legislative right to choose homebirth, whilst in Australia, as from July 2010, it may be illegal to birth at home with a registered caregiver should the proposed legislative changes be enacted. In areas that do not have a birth centre, the only option for birth will be in a hospital.

The Federal Services Review (Feb 2009) advised against premature support for homebirth to avoid "*polarizing the professions*" (p20) and because insurance "*premium costs would be very high*" (p20). However, evidence-based practice supports the claim that homebirth, attended by a qualified midwife, is a safe option for low risk women. Exclusion of homebirth from the above Bills should not be made on the grounds of personal objection from medical obstetricians. Insurance premium costs are high for obstetric practitioners and yet they are eligible for government support. Why should it be any different for midwives who are attending lower risk births, with presumably fewer adverse incidents?

Positive birth outcomes for both mother and baby are more likely when a woman is able to birth in a place she feels comfortable, particularly when supported by well qualified and experienced birth care professionals of her choosing, whether this be in a hospital, birth centre or at home..

Yours sincerely,

Friends of the Mackay Birth Centre Committee