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July 19, 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

Midwyf Services is a private midwifery practice that provides continuity of midwifery care to Australian rural and metropolitan women, and has been doing so for the past 13 years. During that time Midwyf Services has birthed in excess of 350 babies in an honoured and nurtured environment, both in hospitals and at home, with incredibly motivated, educated and well informed women and families.

The philosophy of Midwyf Services is the provision of safe and evidence based Midwifery care. This is a model of care that demonstrates the safety of homebirth and has been clearly supported by research from such countries as Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and The Netherlands.

Research of more than 600,000 births, published a few months ago in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, concluded that "planning a home birth does not increase the risks of perinatal mortality and severe perinatal morbidity among low-risk women, provided the maternity care system facilitates this choice through the availability of well-trained midwives and through a good transportation and referral system".

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, in response, said it supported home births for low-risk pregnancies, provided there were appropriate infrastructure and resources.

Midwyf Services is totally dismayed and concerned by the above mentioned bills. We understand that these bills will provide indemnity insurance for midwives who care for women in hospital through Medicare funding and access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme but will exclude midwives providing a home birth service.

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.

Home birth is a legitimate choice for women. The Australian maternity system needs to promote this choice by providing the appropriate infrastructure and resources. Ignoring the fact that some women will choose to birth at home will not make it go away. We need to acknowledge this, and provide access to home births as a mainstream option.

Midwyf Services supports a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. Midwives also have a right to practice in a private capacity, with women and families having the right to choose their midwife.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Marie Heath RM. RN. CFHN. Cert.FPA