

10 December 2009

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee,

Re: Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into 'Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009'

Friends of the Mackay Birth Centre (FMBC) is a not-for-profit community group that exists to support and advocate for 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 extreme concern about the above-mentioned Bill.

As proposed, the Bill will give doctors power to determine whether privately practicing midwives can access insurance, and consequently their ability to practice. In no other profession is registration subject to control by anyone other than the professions' regulatory body. Yet, under the proposed Bill, midwives will be subject to control by another profession, which has a vested interest in not supporting the practice of private midwives. The AMA and Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are openly opposed to homebirth, so it would be naïve to think that they would consider entering into the "collaborative arrangement" stipulated in the Bill.

Previously, in the Mackay region, women opting for midwifery-led Birth Centre care could enter into a shared-care arrangement with a privately practicing GP Obstetrician (the only one out of four privately practicing Obstetricians who would support this choice for women). But, over the last two years this practitioner has been forced out of both private and public care arrangements by more senior Obstetric practitioners who would no longer support her practice. If doctors will do this to "one of their own" (someone with over a decade of experience with proven clinical excellence) they certainly will not support midwifery-led care.

If the above-mentioned Bill is passed unchanged it will be impossible for the women of Australia to choose private practice midwifery-led maternity care. Privately practicing doctors, in whose interest it is to reduce competition for maternity care providers, will ensure an end to the privately practicing midwifery profession. It will be a sad day for this so-called democratic and progressive society if this legislation is passed in its current form.

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. The arguments being made in support of the above Bill are being made on personal, biased grounds and are not born out in the growing number of large-scale, well-conducted studies that support homebirth and midwifery-led care as a safe option for low-risk women.

Why is the Government happy to support expensive elective caesarean section but not low cost vaginal birth at home? Surely, surgical birth carries more risk and, therefore, higher indemnity premium than natural birth?

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 a doctor or a midwife in a hospital, birth centre or at home.

Yours sincerely,

Friends of the Mackay Birth Centre Committee