

December 6, 2009

TO: The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600  
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au  
fax (02) 6277 5829.

FROM: Gera Simkins and Board  
President of the Board  
Midwives Alliance of North America

Dear Senate Community Affairs Committee,

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

**The Midwives Alliance of North America is writing in response and with grave concern regarding the above Bill scheduled for revision for February 2010.** Scientific research from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and The Netherlands has consistently demonstrated that homebirth not only is just as safe as hospital birth for low risk women but incurs less cost, less morbidity from decreased interventions and increased client satisfaction as well as better long term health outcomes. In a country committed to decreasing health disparities among groups and committed to excellence and choice in maternal and infant health, we are shocked that you would consider discriminating against an entire group of individuals. Not only is homebirth a viable choice made by women who wish to birth safely and avoid unnecessary medical interventions, but it may be the only choice for women who live in rural and distant areas, as is the case in much of Australia.

In the US we are increasingly recognizing the cost effectiveness of out of hospital birth as well as recognizing the need to protect normal birth among low risk women. The US has pioneered the Direct Entry Midwife who attends specifically to out of hospital birth and is an expert in normal birth. The Midwives Alliance of North America is an umbrella organization representing the profession of midwifery which includes direct entry midwives, certified professional midwives, certified nurse midwives, traditional midwives and nurses who chose to attend births. As an autonomous professional organization we believe that it is within our own profession that we must be regulated, and thus have created educational and registration organizations that respond specifically to our unique professional needs and requirements. Just as we would not expect to regulate obstetricians, we do not expect to be regulated by other professionals, particularly those that are not expert in out of hospital birth.

In particular we are concerned that the proposed amendments will:

- Eliminate choices for women and will make it impossible for a woman to choose private practice midwife led care in Australia;
- Place physicians rather than women at the centre of maternity care.
- Place midwifery skills and practice within the jurisdiction of physicians rather than an independent registration and licensing body.
- Considering that the AMA and Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are not outwardly supportive of homebirth, it is unrealistic to expect that members of

these organisations will readily enter into collaborative arrangements with midwives providing women with this choice;

- Adversely discriminate against women living in rural areas whose primary choice is homebirth.
- Deny the application of valid scientific studies that repeatedly demonstrate that out of hospital birth with midwives is safer and provides better outcomes and increased satisfaction than hospital birth, particularly hospital birth with obstetricians<sup>12</sup>

As professionals working for a common goal of improving health outcomes for women and babies across the world we ask that a woman's right to choose self employed midwives for maternity care be respected and not restricted as a result of the amendment. We also request that you respect the international definition of a midwife as a "professional and accountable professional who works in partnership with women to give the necessary support, care and advice... to conduct births on the midwife's own responsibility"<sup>3</sup>.

Sincerely,

Geradine Simkins, RN, CNM, MSN

President

Midwives Alliance of North America

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<sup>1</sup> de Jonge A, van der Goes B, Ravelli A, Amelink-Verburg M, Mol B, Nijhuis J, Gravenhorst J, Buitendijk S. Perinatal mortality and morbidity in a nationwide cohort of 529 688 low-risk planned home and hospital births. BJOG 2009 10.1111/j.1471-0528.2009.0217

<sup>2</sup> Patricia A. Janssen, Lee Saxell, Lesley A. Page, Michael C. Klein, Robert M. Liston, and Shoo K. Lee Outcomes of planned home birth with registered midwife versus planned hospital birth with midwife or physician Can. Med. Assoc. J., Sep 2009; 181: 377 - 383.

<sup>3</sup> International Confederation of Midwives, Definition of a Midwife, adopted at the council meeting, Brisbane, Australia, July 2005.