I wish to register my strong support for the Safe Access Zones bill currently under discussion in the Assembly. It is insupportable that current harassment legislation does not cover instances of co-ordinated harassment, where groups of individuals take turns in approaching a single person so that no one member of the group reaches the legal threshold for it to be considered harassment. It defies logic and common sense that we cannot legally recognise when people are coming together to act in a co-ordinated way to circumvent such important legislation and act accordingly.

Beyond that, many of the clinics which provide abortion care also provide many other services related to reproductive health, including advice and assistance to those experiencing miscarriage. It is beyond disgusting that people who are experiencing one of the most difficult things a person can go through are subjected to the graphic images and violent words of protesters. But, even if these clinics did provide ONLY abortions services, it would still be disgusting that people accessing legally available healthcare should be subjected to this, and should be forced to endure this abuse – and abuse it is – simply because there are some in society who refuse to accept that everyone does not want to live according to their own personal belief system.

Freedom of speech is often cited as a reason to allow protest, but even now (without any of the authoritarian anti-protest legislation that the government in Westminster has proposed), there are agreed limits on when and where people may protest. Freedom of speech is not an absolute freedom or right, and never has been. It is disingenuous, to the point of being outright dishonest, to try to invoke it to allow abuse of people seeking healthcare which has, lest we forget, also been designated a human right.

I am disgusted that this legislation is needed at all – I am even more disgusted by the equivocation and attempts to derail and diminish it. I hope to see this legislation passed in full and without delay.