

This document is in response to your call for evidence of peoples' views on the Abortion Services Bill regarding Safe Access Zones introduced by Claire Bailey in September. It would be greatly appreciated if you would consider the points below before making any decisions on this matter.

The first point I would like to discuss is that freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression are fundamental human rights. Both are protected under Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act. This Bill is in breach of Articles 10 and 11 as it targets and criminalises anyone who wishes to exercise those freedoms when they believe that everyone has the right to the first and the most important human right i.e., the right to life and that right includes unborn children. It is draconian, oppressive, and discriminatory. I am certain that most if not all parties in the Assembly have exercised those same rights, so why should someone else be denied their rights, especially when it involves the murder (as that is what it is no matter how you sugar coat it) of unborn human beings- unborn but still alive children.

Secondly, this Bill will make it a crime and punishable on conviction by fines of up to £2,500 for only those people who wish to exercise those freedoms through holding a sign, giving out information leaflets, talking to a woman (with her consent) on offering help and an alternative to abortion or even simply praying outside abortion centres. If a woman is determined to have an abortion it will still happen and it will not matter if there are people or no people outside an abortion centre. It will rob those women who are unsure and to know that there is an alternative to abortion and make the choice to decide to keep their baby.

Thirdly, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression outside abortion centres are peaceful and police already have adequate powers to deal with any alleged activity that is against the law. I trust the committee will be reviewing the evidence produced and provided by Claire Bailey on the harassment and intimidation of women who wish to access the services provided by abortion centres. There is no police evidence to substantiate her claim.

Finally, this Bill admits that it is reasonable to assume the majority of costs imposed on the Department of Health for Northern Ireland will arise from enforcement and legal costs. Two similar abortion zones in England have cost the taxpayer £150,000 and £250,000 (so far and mostly in legal costs). The Health Service in Northern Ireland is already in crisis due to lack of funding. Surely it would be reasonable to assume that taxpayer money would be spent more appropriately considering the ever-growing waiting lists for cancer treatments, surgeries etc... that have been suspended due to the current COVID crisis and not on legal costs which will continue to increase due to enforcement of abortion zones.

In conclusion, please remember that the people of Northern Ireland have already been denied their right to self-determination on the issue of abortion. Denied by certain parties present in the assembly and I have no doubt, members of the Health Committee, who signed the Good Friday Agreement which emphasised **OUR** right to self-determination - the assembly of Northern Ireland on all matters related to Northern Ireland and not by Westminster. So now some of the people of Northern Ireland may be denied their right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression on one of the most grievous crimes against humanity in the world today – the horrific

murder of unborn children. Please consider these points carefully as it will set a precedent for the future for the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and not only on the issue of abortion. People need to be able to exercise these freedoms and be the voice for babies in their mother's womb while abortion laws exist in Northern Ireland.