

The following outlines my strong opposition to the **grave injustice** of the so called “Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill.

- **The purpose of this Bill is to criminalise any pro-life person or group** giving silent witness, praying, or offering life-affirming support around abortion centres in Northern Ireland.
- The Health Committee’s **‘Call for Evidence’ was not publicised** by the Committee which means that many pro-life people across Northern Ireland did not know about this consultation and will have been **denied an opportunity to provide the evidence called for.**
- The Bill is seriously discriminatory and oppressive as it **seeks to target and criminalise innocent members of the public carrying out a peaceful activity.**
- There is **no Police evidence to substantiate Claire Bailey’s claims of ‘harassment’ and ‘intimidation’** outside abortion centres.
- **Pro-life vigils are peaceful**, and the Police already have adequate powers to deal with any breach or alleged breach of the law.
- The Bill is draconian and **will make it a CRIME TO DO ANYTHING** outside an abortion centre which might influence a person in their decision to attend. A CRIME to hold a sign. A CRIME to distribute information leaflets. A CRIME to offer help. A CRIME to even pray. A CRIME to bear silent witness. **PEACEFUL ACTS “punishable on conviction by fines”** up to £2,500
- **The Bill is in direct contravention of the Human Rights Act** (articles 10 and 11) which protect Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Expression. These are fundamental human rights.
- The creation of ‘Abortion Zones’ will rob vulnerable women of alternatives to abortion. **Many women offered help and support outside abortion centres have decided to keep their babies** and have found peace and happiness as a result.
- **This Bill admits that will impose severe costs on the Department of Health.** These costs will be incurred not only in the establishment and reviewing of so called ‘Safe Access Zones’ but also in legal costs incurred from resisting appeals to convictions. Two similar Zones in England have, between them, cost the taxpayer £400,000. The Bill admits that it is reasonable to assume that **the majority of costs IMPOSED on the DEPARTMENT of HEALTH in Northern Ireland will arise from enforcement and legal costs.**
- **The Health Service in Northern Ireland is already in crisis due to lack of funding.** Taxpayers’ money could be better spent on treating people who are on 10 year waiting lists for treatment, rather than adding more financial burdens to the Health Service by needlessly trying to set up and enforce ‘abortion zones’.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission and I would urge you to take on board the **serious injustices enshrined in this Bill** which seeks to criminalise innocent people and deprive them of their human right to Freedom of Assembly and Expression.

I would ask that this Bill is withdrawn in it’s entirety.