

## FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

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Your Ref: C172/21  
Our Ref: CORR/2055/2021  
Date: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Dear *Colm,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 June 2021 regarding the ongoing anti-abortion protests being held at healthcare premises.

I share the Committee's concerns about the impact of protests on both patients and staff. I have stated previously that it is wrong for people using their legal right to protest to obstruct anyone who is accessing lawful healthcare services for whatever reason, and that anyone doing so should desist to allow issues to be resolved democratically. Equally, healthcare staff who work at these facilities must be allowed to carry out their caring duties without obstruction or anxiety.


Health Committee members will be aware that the recommendation contained at paragraph 86g of the CEDAW report relates to the protection of women from harassment by anti-abortion protesters by investigating complaints and prosecuting and punishing perpetrators. I have previously advised that I would be happy to work with the Minister for Justice on this cross-cutting matter to implement any measures which she and the Executive consider appropriate to resolve these matters as soon as possible. Officials from my Department are liaising with the Department of Justice (DoJ) to ascertain the scope of these issues, any advice received from the PSNI, and any plans that the DoJ may have regarding exclusion zones or enforcement. My Department will advise Health and Social Care Trusts accordingly.

In light of easing COVID-19 pressures, my Department has resumed work to develop a service specification for the commissioning of abortion services as envisaged under the Abortion (No.2) Regulations (NI) 2020. Whilst matters of investigation and enforcement remain the responsibility of the DoJ, the recommended service model to emerge from this work will be required to take account of service delivery options to ensure that



Trusts can feasibly provide these services in the longer term in a way that protects patients and staff from obstruction or intimidation. In the meantime, Trusts will be best placed to advise of the specific measures they have taken at the sites which currently provide non-commissioned Early Medical Abortion services, and I note that the Committee has written to Trust Chief Executives for this purpose.

Yours sincerely



**Robin Swann MLA**  
**Minister of Health**



## Committee for Health

Wendy Patterson  
DALO  
Department of Health

[by email]

Our Ref.: C172/21

11 June 2021

Dear Wendy,

### **Re: Protests at premises providing abortion services**

At its meeting on 10 June, the Committee for Health discussed the matter of protests held outside premises providing abortion services and other healthcare services.

Whilst recognising that there is a right to protest, the Committee is concerned that both patients and staff may feel intimidated and harassed by protesters. The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what measures it has taken, or plans to take to address these concerns.

I am writing in similar terms to the Department of Justice and the H&SC Trusts.

I would appreciate a reply by 25 June 2021.

Yours sincerely,

**Keith McBride**  
**Clerk**  
**Committee for Health**

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