

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER

Minister's Office Block B,
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SG
Tel: 028 90522744
DoJ.AssemblySection@justice-ni.gov.uk

Keith McBride
Clerk to the Committee for Health
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

24 June 2021

Dear Keith,

PROTESTS AT PREMISES PROVIDING ABORTION SERVICES

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2021 regarding Health Committee members' concerns about protests outside premises providing abortion services and the impact of these protests on patients and staff.

No-one should be deterred from accessing healthcare or subjected to protests that they may find intimidating and distressing. Where protests are directed at Trust premises they impact not only on pregnant women at a vulnerable time in their lives but also on those who are attending the facility for other reasons, including children and young people, vulnerable and older people, and Health Trust staff.

The Minister has been exploring ways in which to ensure that people have the right to access health-care facilities providing abortion advice and services, without interference, while also protecting the right to protest.

Other jurisdictions have established exclusion zones which provide for a safe zone around healthcare facilities delivering abortion services, so that those accessing them

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can do so without fear or trepidation. Those who wish to protest or express their views on abortion can still do so, but at a suitable distance.

Whilst the Minister is keen to make effective change in this area, to provide for exclusion zones in Northern Ireland will require both an appropriate legislative vehicle and Executive approval. As she has indicated previously, the Minister hopes to have conversations with Executive colleagues on this issue in due course.

Yours sincerely



**CLAIRE McCORMICK
DALO**



Committee for Health

Claire McCormick
DALO
Department of Justice

By email claire.mccormick@justice-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref.: C173/21

11 June 2021

Dear Claire,

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 of Justice to ask what measures it has taken, or plans to take to address these concerns.

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

I would appreciate a reply by 25 June 2021.

Yours sincerely,

Keith McBride
Clerk
Committee for Health

Cc: committee.justice@niassembly.gov.uk