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Call for Evidence - The Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

To whom it may concern,

We write with reference to the Call for Evidence regarding the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill. The discourse surrounding this Bill has been subject to much misinformation. Paul Givan MLA has inaccurately suggested that Clause 1 will increase or pressure women and pregnant people to seek terminations for pregnancies in cases of uncomplicated Down's Syndrome, cleft lip / palate and club foot. This is an inaccurate and misleading claim.

Accordingly, in agreement with experts from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and Doctors for Choice Northern Ireland we strongly condemn this Bill which is neither rooted in fact nor best practice healthcare for women in Northern Ireland.

Statistics from England and Wales indicate that abortions over 24 weeks accounted for only 0.1% of all procedures, meaning that this Bill targets a minority of people and families who will experience much-wanted but complex pregnancy scenarios. Women and pregnant people need time to decide what is best for them and their families and they should not be rushed into this decision.

Ultimately, this misguided bill will put pressure on women to make healthcare decisions before 24 weeks gestation. Preventing abortion access beyond 24 weeks is ill-considered and cruel because very serious abnormalities are only detected at the 20 week scan or later, leaving, at best, four weeks to make a difficult decision. In addition, despite this Bill being mooted as a protection for disabled people, it in fact erases and victimises disabled people who also need access to reproductive healthcare.

As we have seen in the case of Sarah Ewart, the traumatic result of restricted abortion access in Northern Ireland has meant that women have been forced to travel to GB for essential healthcare and as a result do not receive the proper support and aftercare they need. This Bill will mean a continuation of these painful journeys and our shameful history of exporting tragedy. We will be abandoning women and pregnant people in their time of need.

To conclude, rather than rolling back abortion healthcare provision, we feel that Stormont should focus their efforts on improving perinatal care. This would mean extending screening programmes in line with GB, supporting disabled children and their families and commissioning high quality abortion services across the region.

Yours sincerely,
Alliance for Choice Derry