

Dear Committee

On 15th March, The Severe Foetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill passed its Second Stage at the Northern Ireland Assembly. I am sure you are aware that The Health Committee immediately issued a call for evidence on the Bill.

It is for this reason that I am writing to give my evidence regarding the protection of babies with disabilities.

I am a retired teacher of children with additional needs. For many years I had the privilege of working with many children as well as getting to know their parents. Although initially it was a shock for them to find that their child would never reach the potential of mainstream, but not one of them regretted giving birth and they all loved their children deeply. During my years of teaching I learnt so much about taking life as it comes, about taking time to enjoy simple things and to find joy in being together. I remember being asked one day if the class I had been in had children with Downs Syndrome. I replied no there weren't and then saying yes, there was one, no two, no three..... eventually I realised that the majority of them had Downs Syndrome but I knew them as ■■■, ■■■, ■■■ etc. All precious human beings who brought such freshness and joy into the world.

I have a friend who has adopted a little girl with Downs Syndrome. She is adorable and is loved by everyone she meets. My friend is hoping to adopt her little girl's half-brother who also has Downs Syndrome. In the church I attend is a 36 year old with Downs Syndrome called ■■■. ■■■ reads fluently, loves taking part in quizzes, plays tennis and swims, volunteers in the hospital café and charity shop and has a brilliant sense of humour. She signs beautifully and when asked always says life is great. Her middle name is ■■■ which describes her perfectly.

The law protects babies from 24 weeks in the womb until birth, however, babies suspected or diagnosed with non - fatal disabilities are not protected. Babies diagnosed with cleft palate can be aborted. The current abortion law must have a profound negative impact on people living with disabilities as well as mothers carrying babies where disabilities may be detected.

Are we trying to create a perfect world? What gives anyone the right to say who should or should not be born? People with disabilities have just as much right to live and be part of our world as we do.

May people be granted compassion and wisdom.