

02/05/2021

Dear Health Committee members,

I am writing to you to let you know of my support for the NI Abortion Bill. These are my reasons.

This Bill aims to combat the disability discrimination that exists within the current abortion regulations. At the moment, the law protects babies without a “disability” in the womb from the 24th week of pregnancy so that they cannot be aborted; however it does not provide the same protection for babies of the same gestation who have a suspected or diagnosed non-fatal disability. A separate gestational limit for abortion on the grounds of non-fatal disability is discriminatory.

The current abortion law perpetuates stereotypes towards people with disabilities and will have a profoundly negative impact on those with disabilities. A person living with a disability in Northern Ireland will feel the affects of this law. They could understandably feel that the law is saying that they should have been aborted and should not be alive.

Parents of children with conditions such as Down’s syndrome in other parts of the UK have spoken out about the stigma and stereotypes that the equivalent law in Great Britain perpetuates and the impact that this has on medical treatment that they have received while pregnant and beyond. The current abortion law will therefore, have a negative impact on women who are pregnant with a disabled child.

Attitudes towards disability have changed significantly in the past 30 years, as reflected in the legislation in this area: the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. All of these aim to foster equality and introduce legal provisions against disability discrimination in Northern Ireland. These laws reflect the fact that every person, regardless of so-called disability, is of value and worth. The current abortion law undermines 30 years of disability protection and fighting for equality in Northern Ireland.

I believe this Bill will help foster equality by upholding the rights of the unborn with disabilities and reinforcing the understanding that every person in Northern Ireland deserves equality and respect.

Thank you for your careful consideration of all viewpoints around this issue.