

Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill I support the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill for the following reasons:

All babies in the womb should be treated equally.

The current regulations allow abortion for non-fatal conditions up to birth, however the limit for all other abortions where there is no disability is 24 weeks.

This different limit is a clear discrimination against babies in the womb diagnosed with a disability.

The negative effect of this kind of discrimination.

This perceived discrimination has a negative effect on those living with disability, whether as an adult with a disability or parents with a child who has a disability.

It sends a message to those living with disabilities (and to our society) that their lives are not as valued as those who do not have a disability, since we are in effect saying those with a disability should not have been born.

Pregnant women who have received a diagnosis of disability in the child they are carrying, can feel more pressure to end their pregnancy. The equivalent abortion legislation in Britain has negatively impacted mothers with a disabled child in the treatment they have received both during pregnancy and after birth.

Discrimination and the law.

Attitudes towards disability have changed over the last few decades. Legislation has reinforced this and for those living with disability in our society, both adults and children there is now protection from discrimination in the law and measures are in place to ensure they are not disadvantaged because of their disability.¹

Babies in the womb with a disability deserve the same rights as children who are born or as the adults they will become. If this is not the case and the law does not protect these rights, then attitudes towards disability will gradually change back again and there is the likelihood of more intolerance and subsequent discrimination towards those living with disability.

This Bill will help our society to continue to fight against discrimination and show that in Northern Ireland we value everyone - disabled or not, born or not yet born.

I hope that the Committee will take all necessary steps to ensure this Bill becomes law.

¹ Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006