

Dear Health Committee,

I have written this letter to note my objection to The Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

I, like many people of the six counties, have had to travel to access reproductive healthcare. I was shipped off rather than receiving free, safe, and local care. We were promised that no-one would have to travel for healthcare ever again, we would be treated with kindness and compassion, yet this bill will inflict harm on pregnant parents and their families.

Firstly, the bill will limit the amount of time pregnant parents and their families have to decide on how to proceed with care after a diagnosis. The abnormality scan, which is when Clinicians usually detect very serious abnormalities, usually takes place at 20 weeks gestation. This bill, by limiting at 24 weeks, will mean that families will only have 4 weeks to decide their care plan. Given the large emotional toll a severe fatal abnormality can cause, it may be very difficult for these families to disentangle thoughts and wishes around care and the system should be helping by providing compassionate care rather than force a sense of urgency to make very big care decisions. This bill targets parents who are experiencing much-wanted pregnancies but are facing a very complex situation.

Secondly, by placing limits, given the time it may take people to decide, may result in people once again having to travel to Great Britain to access healthcare that could easily be provided here. This will compound the heartbreak these families face. They will have to face the burden of booking travel arrangements, speaking with booking pathways, finding care for other dependents etc. which is unnecessary stress. This is why so many campaigned for human rights compliant reproductive healthcare. This removes their care from their community that supports them. We should be providing healthcare here, at a local centre, to allow them the easiest access to healthcare possible and allow them to be surrounded by their support systems.

Thirdly, the wording of the bill suggests that doctors may pressure pregnant parents into having an abortion. It denies a patient-centred and multidisciplinary approach to antenatal care. Doctors should be trusted to provide as many options to parents as is reasonably available and provide as much information as is required to allow parents to make an informed choice. Patients should be trusted to choose the right option for them and their families.

We must have free, legal, and local for all pregnant people of the six counties. We cannot continue to fail people when they need compassionate care the most.