

I am making this submission to the Committee in support of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

I have previously worked in Cellular Pathology at an NHS hospital, here in Northern Ireland. My hospital dealt with tissues samples referred to as Products of Conception, the tissues left over from an early-term miscarriage. Most of these samples had no apparent foetus, but some did, which were usually old and large enough to be sent to a more specialised lab elsewhere in Northern Ireland - as I was a very junior member of staff, I typically would not deal with these. One time, I was giving initial examination to the incoming samples, when I opened a container and found it to contain a whole, undamaged foetus.

It was beautiful. The skin was so translucent the ribcage could be seen. The fingers and toes were formed. The eyes were still closed, but obvious between the sealed lids. It could have fitted into the palm of my hand - only thirteen weeks' gestation, 6.5cm rump to crown. It was impossible to look at this wonderfully formed child and dismiss it as not worthy of being human.

And yet it was terrible, because this child - this lovely, incredibly made child - was dead. A life cut short before it had a chance to live. This was a tragedy; this was a life lost. I cannot see how this terrible, sad fact can be dressed up as a loss of tissues.

Last year, there were more abortions worldwide than there were post-birth deaths. More children died before they had a chance to live than people who did. And how many for spurious reasons? Because the parents didn't find it convenient? Because the mother wanted a boy, not a girl? Or because the parents would rather not bother with a simple surgery to correct a club foot?

These are not fatal issues. People with Down's Syndrome go on to live full and happy lives. Cleft lip is so easy to correct, there are charities going around Africa doing so for only £150 per 45 minute surgery. Club foot is likewise easy to correct.

I wonder what will be next, if regulations are not put in place. You think autistic kids would be aborted, if it could be detected in utero? That would be unfortunate; my boyfriend might never have been born.

The child I saw was lost before abortion was forced upon Northern Ireland in a shocking breach of devolution. Sometimes I wonder how many more like it I might see if I was still in that job - or if such children would even have been granted the courtesy we gave that child.

Oh yes, did you know the complex rules regarding tissue disposal? Did you know that, even if there is no evidence a Products of Conception sample ever contained a foetus, that it was more than an anembryonic pregnancy, we still had to get dedicated tissue disposal forms? That Products of

Conception samples were cremated separately from the various skin tags and cancerous organs? I wonder what the rules are these days.

The government and the laws exist to protect the most vulnerable in society. I ask the committee to hold the government to that responsibility - who are more vulnerable than disabled, unborn children?