

Submission to the Committee for Health on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

Introduction

The Christian Institute exists for “the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom”. We are a nondenominational Christian charity operating throughout the UK. Within Northern Ireland we are supported by approximately 10,000 individuals and churches. We hold to the mainstream Christian beliefs that all people are made in the image of God and that life begins at conception. Therefore all people are worthy of dignity and respect, whether inside or outside the womb, and whether a person has a disability or not.

The Christian Institute is opposed to abortion as a matter of principle. Abortion at any stage in a pregnancy always takes the life of an unborn human being. It can also have serious consequences for the mother’s physical and mental health. We strongly objected to Westminster’s imposition of the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (‘the Regulations’) on Northern Ireland.

Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

The introduction of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill is very welcome. Although the majority of abortions would be unaffected by this law, it would correct an injustice that should be obvious to everyone. The current law in Northern Ireland (and the rest of the UK) is clearly discriminatory. Unborn babies who may have disabilities can be aborted up to birth, whereas the limit for other babies is twelve or 24 weeks.

The Regulations ostensibly implement the recommendations of paragraphs 85 and 86 of the 2018 CEDAW Committee’s report on the UK. However, at paragraph 85b the report says that in the making of new laws on abortion “stereotypes towards people with disabilities” should not be perpetuated. This cannot be achieved if the Regulations allow disabled babies to be treated differently. Negative stereotypes towards people with disabilities are an inevitable consequence of the Regulations, which imply that unborn disabled lives are not worth as much as others and can be terminated without time limit.

People with disabilities live active, fulfilled lives, and are loved and valued by their friends and families. But disability campaigner Heidi Crowter, who has Down’s syndrome, has said that the equivalent law in Britain makes her feel unloved, unwanted and like she should never have been born.¹ This law has led to the abortion of around 90 per cent of babies diagnosed before birth with Down’s syndrome in England and Wales.²

Under the disability ground of the Abortion Act 1967 in Britain, babies have been aborted for very treatable conditions like cleft lip or cleft palate.³ This is surely not what the Act intended

¹ *BBC News online*, 24 February 2020, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51612884> as at 5 May 2021; *Scottish Daily Mail*, 26 November 2020

² Morris, J K and Springett, A, *The National Down Syndrome Cytogenetic Register for England and Wales: 2013 Annual Report*, Queen Mary University of London, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry December 2014, page 17

³ *Abortion statistics for England and Wales 2019: data tables*, ONS, June 2020, Table 9a

by “seriously handicapped”. It is tragic that certain kinds of people are deemed to be less worthy of life than others.

As Fiona Bruce MP put it, disabled babies currently have “effectively no rights up to birth”.⁴ This Bill tackles an essential issue of principle and would remedy the current inconsistent and discriminatory situation.

The Christian Institute
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⁴ House of Commons, Hansard, 9 April 2014, col. 386