



Police Service of Northern Ireland

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Keith McBride
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Our Ref: 12814-21
Your Ref: C287/21

By Email:
Committee.Health@niassembly.gov.uk

13 January 2022

Dear Mr McBride

Re: The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill

I am writing in response to your request for additional information and statistics that may be held by the police in relation to the numbers of police deployments in response to either planned or spontaneous gatherings or protests at facilities that may be providing medical advice on abortion.

Please note that, although I have conducted a full trawl of police incident reports, the police would not hold a full and accurate record of all locations that provide these services and so we are reliant upon the contact report held on police systems to clearly articulate that the incident is linked to protest or gathering around abortion issues.

I can confirm that in the 12 month period from January 2021 to January 2022, police have been requested to attend at 55 incidents in relation to gatherings/ protest centred on abortion at medical facilities across Northern Ireland. I can further update that all of these deployments were spontaneous in nature and in response to requests, usually from either members of the public or staff employed within the facility in question.

In addition, I thought it might be helpful to provide an operational overview from a policing perspective regarding the now closed, Marie Stopes Clinic in Belfast. This location was the focus of intense and sustained protest related activity from 2013 until its closure, At the height of protest activity, there was a clearly highly organised and motivated protest group who attended at the premises on a daily basis and police were deployed on a similar daily basis.



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During this time, police recorded 85 crime occurrences. This was broken down into 62 allegations made by staff working at the clinic and 23 allegations made by protestors. Of particular note for the committee, one anti-abortion protestor was successfully prosecuted for harassment but this conviction was overturned on appeal. The Judge considering the appeal described the protestor's behaviour as unpleasant but did not meet the level of *criminal harassment*.

I trust this provides an overview of the demand this is already placing on police resources, who attend every one of these incidents, and then spend time investigating and processing any forthcoming complaints.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if any further detail is required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melanie Jones'.

MELANIE JONES
Chief Superintendent
Community Safety Department



Committee for Health

Chief Superintendent Melanie Jones
Head of Criminal Justice
Community Safety Department
Police Service of Northern Ireland

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Our Ref: C02/22

12 January 2022

Dear Chief Superintendent Jones,

RE: Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill

Thank you for your attendance at yesterday's Health Committee meeting and for providing the views of the PSNI on the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill. The session will greatly assist and inform the Committee's consideration of the Bill.

Further to your attendance, the Committee would appreciate information relating to the PSNI's attendance at clinics at which protests take place. The Committee asked for the number of occasions (per year, over the last three years) in which the PSNI attended premises which provide abortion services and/or associated counselling and support, and a breakdown of whether these attendances were pro-active on the part of the PSNI or in response to a reported incident.

The Committee also agreed to ask the PSNI for detail on the existing legislation which relates and applies to the policing of protests at these premises.

I would appreciate if this information could be provided before 20 January 2022.

Yours sincerely,

Keith McBride
Clerk
Committee for Health