

I would like to lend my support to **Clare Bailey's Safe Access Zones Bill**.

Thankfully I have never had to make this decision myself however I have witnessed on many occasions what women and girls have had to face whilst trying to access this service. A couple of examples come to mind.

I used to work on Great Victoria Street when the Marie Stopes clinic opened to perform private abortions under the existing NI law. Bearing in mind the extremely restrictive conditions under which this was allowed (risk of death was pretty much it) I was utterly horrified at the harassment women faced whilst trying to access this service. They were screamed at, called murderers and even had holy water thrown at them.

More recently I have observed a picket on several occasions (I understand this happens most days) outside the family planning clinic on College Street in Belfast city centre - usually around 5 or 6 people (mostly men, notably) holding up extremely offensive slogans and pictures of abortions, along with factually inaccurate information. Whilst I didn't personally observe any vocal harassment as such, the presence of these people and their placards must be extremely distressing to anyone accessing this clinic for any reason - as I understand the clinic provides advice on lots of issues of which abortion is only one. One lunchtime I cautiously approached a protestor and asked what he thought went on inside the clinic and he said "babies are being murdered". You simply cannot reason with these people.

Women and girls have a right (now legal in NI thankfully) to access abortion services free from harassment and vilification. For this reason I fully support Clare's Bill.