

My husband and I write this submission with heavy hearts and in total disbelief that Clare Bailey's Draconian bill is even being considered.

The bill's sole purpose is to oppress freedom of assembly and expression, both protected under articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act. It is aimed specifically at Christians holding prayerful witness to life outside places that facilitate human destruction by abortion.

The serious and completely unfounded allegations made at the hearing of the bill were outrageous to say the least. Where is the evidence. In a democracy people are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. That is the basic foundation of our Legal system. And yet not one shred of evidence was produced at that hearing. If this supposed "harrasment" and "intimidation" is happening at these facilities the police already have the power to act. They haven't though because there is nothing to act upon.

There is no place in a civilised democratic society for suppression of the truth of real and actual "choice" through the provision of actual and real alternatives to abortion. The fact Claire Bailey and her supporters do not want pro-life witness to occur at abortion facilities only highlights therefore that she and her supporters are not "pro-choice" at all but pro-abortion as the only option and seek to criminalise those that want to rescue those being lead to slaughter.

I have personally witnessed that the information offered to these vulnerable women and girls out of concern and REAL compassion, often the only alternative to abortion to help that they will be given or have access to is not only not shared by those in the facilities but is often physically removed out of their hands without their consent by staff at those facilities. They do not want these women to have any other option, or even to make a fully informed decision with access to all the information.

These claims by MLA Bailey are a targeted attack on Christian men and women. The majority of people who strongly believe that praying outside buildings where babies are being killed are Christian people. This is still a Christian nation having being built on a Judeo-Christian foundation. No act, no mandate, no man can change that basic truth no matter how much some may try to censor, intimidate and indeed threaten us into silence.

There is so much evidence of women who have welcomed the support pro-life vigils have offered them. There are even cases of post-abortive women who deeply regret having an abortion and have retrospectively contacted pro-life organisations distraught that no one was "there" to offer them any alternative help at the moment they needed it. It is truly heart-breaking to hear or see the profound pain and regret they have and live with daily. They have also encouraged others with their stories, many of whom were being coerced to have an abortion. Whatever the woman chooses she should not be punished through lack of information and alternatives due to the actions of our MLAs who are meant to serve us all.

We already have a healthcare service on its knees in terms of human and financial resources. We also know Two similar "buffer zones" in England have cost the taxpayer an estimated £150,000 and £250,000. These costs were imposed on the public for the legal costs that were incurred from resisting appeals to convictions. This Bill admits that the majority of costs on the Department of Health will arise from enforcement and legal costs. We believe taxpayers money would be better spent on reducing our extensive hospital waiting lists rather than add additional costs to our struggling Health Service by funding 'Exclusion Zones'.

Finally, this Bill will "...make it a *CRIME to DO ANYTHING...*" outside an abortion centre "...which might influence a person in their decision to attend..." an abortion centre. Simply holding a sign; distributing information leaflets; talking to a woman to offer her help, or even praying outside an abortion centre will be "...punishable on conviction by fines..." up to £2500. If I choose to practice my right to freedom of expression by praying outside any facility where abortions take place, I or others would be subject to being criminalised!

Please consider your decision very carefully. The eyes of the world are upon us. We want and indeed need to show the world that we are a developed civilised society now and that division is no longer relevant here. Please do not allow regression and totalitarianism to reign.