

I'm writing in support of Clair Bailey's Safe Access Zone Bill.

I believe that current Harassment Law is not adequate to protect people trying to access healthcare providers of reproduction services. This is because current legislation requires two or more occasions to make the legal threshold. However, protesters at clinics use strategies such as different individual approaching the same patient. Often clinic protests are accompanied by graphic images, which are particularly distressing for people who have experienced a miscarriage.

These protests are intimidating, limit the access to legal abortions services and have a detriment effect on the mental health of those trying to access these.

Although Free Speech is a qualified right, this bill would not restrict antichoice protests outside of safe access zones but will protect the wellbeing of anybody trying to access healthcare at these clinics.

I believe that Safe access zones are a proportionate response to balance the rights to free speech and assembly and the rights to private life and health.

Whilst fines will not deter individuals to continue harassing, especially those backed by organisations willing to pay those fines, anyone committing an offence under this bill must be required to attend training on anti-harassment training, similar to driving offences and speeding awareness training.

There is a binding duty on the NI Secretary of State to fully implement CEDAW's 2018 recommendation to the UK Government to "protect women from harassment from anti-abortion protestors by investigating complaints, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators" which is contained in S9 Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019

To fail to provide safe access zones may constitute further human rights breaches as this could make lawful abortion prohibited in practice. The European Court of Human Rights found in cases where abortion is lawful but access is prohibited in practice – for example, by health professionals, structures or unclear information – Article 8 (e.g. *Tysi c v. Poland* (Application no. 5410/03) (2007) and Article 3 (e.g. *S. v Poland* (Application no. 57375/08) (2012)).