

I wish to record my opposition to this proposed bill in the strongest possible terms. To me it represents a wider push by society in general and the government in particular, to try and control people's lives. It opposes the principle of free speech and freedom of expression by prohibiting ANY activity outside an abortion centre "... which might influence a person to attend ..." such a centre. We are told that no woman makes such a decision lightly and that their action often arises from being in difficult personal circumstances; yet anyone attempting to offer help, either directly, through the provision of information leaflets or - God forbid - by praying for them may be punished by fines of up to £2,500. It also creates a dangerous precedent by implying that any views which might be deemed distressing to ANYONE can be legally prohibited; indeed this trend towards silencing others has already gathered significant pace in recent years and is poisoning all public discourse as people are hounded out of their jobs for expressing a viewpoint contrary to that deemed 'acceptable' by a minority of activists.

It is notable that the person proposing this measures works (albeit in a voluntary capacity) For the Marie Stopes abortion provider - hardly a neutral advocate. Both the British Home Secretary and the Department of Health in Ireland have rejected calls for 'buffer zones' around abortion clinics, **based upon examination of evidence** from police reports, as opposed to Ms Sugden's anecdotal evidence.

The cost of implementing such zones would fall upon the Department of Health in Northern Ireland which is already in the throes of a funding crisis. It makes no sense to implement an unnecessary measure which would divert monies from much needed services such as provision of essential surgery, in order to cover enforcement costs and the inevitable legal costs which would arise from challenges to convictions. Indeed, I would argue also that the legal system in Northern Ireland does not need the potential additional burden of attempting to pursue such prosecutions either.