

We are writing to share our thoughts on Clare Bailey's Bill. We believe this Bill to be draconian and oppressive and discriminatory as it will only target pro-life men and women. We have attended pro-life vigils, and have never witnessed any of the alleged accusations that have been made by members of the NI Assembly. We are Christian people and the men and women we see there are also Christian people who now face criminalisation for praying at a building where babies are being killed.

These claims by MLA Bailey are a targeted attack on Christian men and women. The PSNI are aware of when these peaceful prayer vigils take place, I have seen them in attendance. If any of this alleged activity has taken place, surely the police already have the power to deal with it?. But there is no Police evidence to back up Green Party Leader; Clare Bailey's claims of 'Harassment' and 'Intimidation' near or outside abortion centres in Northern Ireland. It just doesn't make sense.

We think this is an attempt to control and censor the fundamental human rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression which are both protected under Articles 10 & 11 of the Human Rights Act. The majority of people who strongly believe that praying outside buildings where babies are being killed are Christian people. Hence why we believe this Bill to be a targeted campaign against human rights and religious freedom. We have all suffered enough segregation in Northern Ireland over the years, this draconian bill is a definite step back in what should be an inclusive society.

The proposed 'Abortion Zones' will rob vulnerable women of an alternative to abortion. Women should be allowed to make their own choice if they want to approach someone who is there to help them, they should decide. There is much evidence out there of women who have welcomed the support pro-life vigils have offered them. 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 because of MLAs.

The reviewing of these 'Safe Access Zones' could impose costs on the Department of Health. Two similar 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. Our health service in Northern Ireland is already under immense strain, but 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'.

The final point we would like to include in our submission is the fact that 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!

We feel very strongly about this matter and feel freedom of assembly and freedom of expression for Christian pro-life people is being targeted by this Bill.