

I wish to raise my objection to a bill criminalising people for a peaceful protest. This bill is undemocratic as it opposes the free will of the people who wish to offer help to save lives.

The Bill is draconian and oppressive, and totally discriminatory as it only targets and criminalises pro-life people.

- Pro-life vigils are peaceful, and the police already have adequate powers to deal with any alleged activity that is against the law.
- There is no Police evidence to substantiate Claire Bailey's claims of 'harassment' and 'intimidation' outside abortion centres
- The 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
- Freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are fundamental human rights – both protected under Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act.
- These 'Abortion Zones' will rob vulnerable women of an alternative to abortion. Pro-Life groups have evidence of many women offered help and support outside abortion centres, who decided to keep their babies. Women are more inclined to keep their babies when there is no coercion involved while often those going for abortion are doing so because of duress. Real choice allows the women to hear all sides before making a decision.
- The establishment and reviewing of so-called 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 imposed on the public purse were in relation to legal costs incurred from resisting appeals to convictions. This Bill admits that it is reasonable to assume that the majority of costs imposed on the Department of Health in Northern Ireland will arise from enforcement and legal costs. The Health Service in Northern Ireland is already in crisis due to lack of funding. Taxpayers' money could be better spent on treating people who are on 10 year waiting lists for treatment, rather than adding more financial burdens to the Health Service by needlessly trying to set up and enforce 'abortion zones'.