

I feel very strongly that this Bill will infringe my human rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. We live in a tolerant society and people should be allowed to gather to voice their opinions even if they strongly disagree with others' views. The Human Rights Act, Articles 10 and 11 enshrine the ideas of free speech. The majority of people in Northern Ireland are opposed to abortion and should be allowed to voice their views. I have always felt that this is an issue which unites Christians here in NI and I have always been pleased to see people of all Christian faiths and none joining in over the years signing petitions throughout the Troubles to show our disagreement to introducing abortion in this province of Ireland. That we should now be silenced is unfair and undemocratic. This Bill only wants to criminalise pro-life campaigners and no other group in society.

Any pro-life vigils I have witnessed are peaceful and serve only to make the public aware that there is an alternative to abortion. How many childless couples would happily adopt a child, if a parent was supported through their pregnancy rather than feeling that the mother has no choice. Pro-life groups wish to show a vulnerable mother that there is an alternative by passing on leaflets with addresses of organisations which can support them to continue their pregnancy if they so wish. Many women who feel overwhelmed by their pregnancy have taken these leaflets and sought help from these organisations. This activity can be policed by the law as it stands and there is no need for extra powers which will demonise anyone outside a clinic and be punishable by huge fines of up to £2,500, on conviction.