

12 November 2021

Mr Keith McBride
Health Committee Clerk
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 419 Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr McBride,

RQIA Evidence to NI Assembly Health Committee on the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill

I thank Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide you with The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's response in relation to the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill as introduced by Clare Bailey MLA on 13 September 2021.

The Authority's mandate, as set out in The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003¹, The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009², and in the 2011 Department of Health Framework Document³, is to provide the Minister, through the Department, with ongoing independent assessment of the quality, safety and availability of health and social care services; and to regulate effectively those services which we register.

Our responsibility to provide assurance of the quality of health and social care services provided by Health and Social Care Trusts includes abortion services provided by those Trusts. The Authority will also have a role in the registration and regulation of any future private providers offering such services.

The Authority's inspectors provide an assessment of quality against standards, which are set by the Department of Health. These are The Quality Standards for

¹ The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2003/431/contents/made>

² Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/niu/2009/1/contents>

³ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) Framework Document (September 2011). Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/dhssps-framework-document-september-2011>

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Health and Social Care 2006⁴ (The Quality Standards) which underpin good governance and best practice within health and social care in Northern Ireland, and are compliant with human rights legislation.

In respect of potential future private providers of abortion services in Northern Ireland, the relevant standards are The Minimum Care Standards for Independent Healthcare Establishments⁵; and the Regulations are The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005⁶.

In conducting assessments of services against these Standards, including their human rights dimensions, RQIA considers whether services are safe, effective and compassionate.

RQIA supports the introduction of the Bill as it has the potential to ensure that women accessing these healthcare services can do so in safety, without experiencing harassment, and that the service promotes respect and dignity for the patient in keeping with delivery of compassionate care which is one of the core values for all staff working within the HSC and one of RQIA's key inspection domains. Furthermore, the Bill will protect those members of staff, and others providing a service within these healthcare settings, from abuse and harassment, and this is to be welcomed. RQIA note the monitoring remit of the Department of Health and should this Bill be enacted the RQIA will engage with the Department whether RQIA's existing roles and function could support such requirements in any way.

I trust you find this information useful and I remain happy to provide any further information upon request.

Yours sincerely



Briega Donaghy
Chief Executive

⁴ The Quality Standards for Health and Social Care 2006⁴ (The Quality Standards) Cited: April 2021. Available from <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/quality-standards-health-and-social-care>

⁵ Minimum Care Standards for Independent Healthcare Establishments. Cited: April 2021. Available from: https://www.rqia.org.uk/RQIA/media/RQIA/Resources/Standards/Independent_Healthcare_Minimum_Standards.pdf

⁶ The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Cited: April 2021. Available from: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2005/174/pdfs/nisr_20050174_en.pdf

