

Dear Committee,

This Bill has come to my notice, and as a parent of an adopted female baby who has Down's Syndrome, I feel I can make a valid contribution to this Bill, having brought up the said child for the last 35 years.

During that time there have inevitably been many challenges, some because of the earlier lack of resources to meet the needs and demands of "special needs" human beings. But equally, there have been many joys, as well as experiences which have given my wife and I a much 'rounder' appreciation of life in general.

Our daughter, though obviously less capable in many areas, has nonetheless lived (and lives!) a fulfilled life, having many interests and hobbies. Through the help of various educationalists over her school/college life, her education has enabled her to read and write fluently, and she is more adept than her parents are when it comes to matters of IT – being 'at home' with a mobile phone and an iPad!

It is also noticeable that she makes many friends, and not all from her contacts with others in her Day Care network. My wife always jokes that she can't walk down our High Street without several people stopping to have a chat with our daughter!

She is also a keen and committed member of a local Christian church, and loves attending and joining in with the worship and socialising, and is a paid up member of the local Amateur Dramatic group. She has acted in a few of their Christmas pantomimes, and takes her turn in "front of house" duties such as helping with Interval refreshments, selling raffle tickets, and so on.

Now, if this Bill is passed unamended, any other Down's Syndrome new born baby will be at extreme risk of never growing up into adulthood. My wife and I shudder to think what life would have been like if our daughter had suffered a similar fate because of governmental legislation. Her 'benefits' far outweigh the inevitable 'costs' of bringing up a 'special needs' human being.

And that's the point: **Any** human being, disabled or otherwise, is just that: a human being, and as such entitled to be treated accordingly from cradle to the grave. Have we come to such a place in our society where a life is judged by whether it is considered as 'able' rather than 'disabled'? It is a fact that many of the ills in our country at present have been caused by the 'able' and not the 'disabled'. How many murders have been committed by those considered disabled by Down's Syndrome, for example, compared to those committed by 'normal' people?

Attitudes towards disability have changed significantly in the past 30 years, as reflected in the legislation in this area: the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. All of these aim to foster equality and introduce legal provisions against disability discrimination in Northern Ireland. These laws reflect the fact that every person, regardless of so-called disability, is of value and worth.

I ask that this Amendment is passed and that every 'disabled' baby in the womb, or immediately out of it, is given every opportunity to fulfil their future life. It is NOT their fault that they are born with some disability, whether mental or physical. Rather than being at risk of being 'discarded' by society, we should all be more concerned to ensure that their inevitable shortcomings will be met by a greater level of care, concern, and love.