

Dear Health Committee,

I am a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist with a special interest in abortion care. I am the co-chair of Doctors for Choice NI, a member of the Northern Ireland Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup and a NI representative of the British Society of Abortion Care Providers.

I strongly oppose the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill. This Bill can only be described as regressive and ill-informed. For the women affected, it will be devastating. A severe fetal impairment diagnosis is an exceptionally sad and shocking event for anyone to face in the course of a wanted pregnancy. For a woman to be told that her child may not survive, or that if they do survive they will be seriously disabled, is an unimaginable trauma. To then be told that she is not permitted to have an abortion locally and instead will have to travel to England, is exceptionally unfair. The continuation of forcing women to travel in tragic circumstances and all the resulting implications for their safety and well-being is shameful.

Abortion is now legal in Northern Ireland. We have many dedicated local clinicians who wish to provide the highest standard of safe and compassionate care to women. It is not acceptable that a subset of the women who require care should be denied that care and should be forced to travel. It is not acceptable that these women should then face a substandard experience of healthcare with limited access to counselling, postmortem examination, follow-up arrangements and the heartbreaking difficulty of repatriating the fetal remains.

I strongly believe that abortion services in Northern Ireland should be commissioned to enable delivery within the full extent of the existing legal framework. This existing framework is compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommendations and should remain unchanged. The Bill, if enacted, will not be CEDAW compliant and instead will prevent the delivery of safe compassionate care to women who find themselves in the most difficult and saddest of circumstances.