

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee](#)
Subject: Personal submission to Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018
Date: Wednesday, 29 August 2018 2:55:08 PM

I've had two abortions in my life and known many other women who've had abortions. None has regretted them; none has led to depression or adverse mental health effects.

My first abortion happened because, as a young woman in the 1970s when sex education was accidental rather than planned, I got useless contraceptive advice from a doctor, someone I later discovered was a crusading Catholic. When I returned to him to ask about what seemed to be the early signs of pregnancy, he urged me to go through with it, saying "We need more children from well educated women like you." Looking back on that experience now, it makes me very angry that he took advantage of how vulnerable I was feeling to try to impose his religious views on me.

I had the termination at the [REDACTED]. The staff there were totally professional. I had counselling to inform me of my options, and when I decided to proceed, they explained the procedure calmly and fully. The actual operation was very short and then I stayed in the recovery room until it was OK to go home. There was a feeling of womanly solidarity in that recovery room – a sense of quiet relief.

Armed with much better contraceptive information, I then chose to have an IUD inserted, because I didn't like the idea of taking hormones every day (the pill in those days was much stronger than it is now), and because the IUD was supposed to be just about foolproof – 99.2% effective. I was trying to be as responsible as possible – but wouldn't you know it, mine failed, and this led to my second abortion. Again, no regrets, no emotional scars.

Now past menopause, I don't have to worry about getting pregnant any more. But the right of women to access safe and legal abortion is still one of those touchstone issues that really riles me up.

If a woman gets pregnant and doesn't want to be, what are we going to do – *force* her to go through with it? Surely, even religious zealots wouldn't force a woman to have a baby against her will.

If a woman doesn't want to continue a pregnancy, what should we do: turn a blind eye and leave her to her own devices, or provide access to safe and legal means of termination?

Sure, in a free country, conservative Catholics, evangelical Protestants and their medical crusaders can try to persuade her out of an abortion, and offer counselling and adoption services. But it's the responsibility of the government, on behalf of the people, to make sure any woman not wanting to continue with an unwanted pregnancy does not have to resort to backyard abortions, or run the gauntlet of outdated legislation that stigmatises decisions and criminalises actions.

I have a friend who got pregnant in the 1960s. She was persuaded to go through with it and have her baby adopted out. Some 50 years later, her son sought her out and they met. She'd had two children since that time and she tried to include him in the family. But it didn't work out, and caused much upset on both sides.

They say getting a puppy is for life, not just for Christmas. How much more true is this for a child? Adopting out a baby is a huge decision and one that may well have much more adverse mental health consequences than having a termination. Women should never be pressured into such a decision.

No, the decision about whether to continue with a pregnancy should be taken by the woman, in consultation with her partner (if she has one) and her doctor (as long as their religious views don't come into it).

To ensure women are well placed to make such a decision, appropriate for their own circumstances, the government should ensure there is comprehensive, non-judgemental sex education in schools and online, and doctors should be required to provide pregnancy advice that includes the option to terminate. If doctors have a religious objection, they should be required to admit it and refer the woman to a doctor who will provide such advice.

The days of treating women like simpletons incapable of responsible decision-making or as unwilling incubators for an unwanted child, are long gone. The law ought to catch up.

