

## **Submissions to the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee**

### **Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018**

#### Background

I am a specialist working in sexual and reproductive health in Queensland. As a doctor, I provide termination of pregnancy services at Marie Stopes Australia Townsville. I also work as a General Practitioner. I work in rural Queensland and so I am familiar with the challenges that women face when accessing healthcare, particularly sexual and reproductive healthcare, in rural Queensland.

#### Support for the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018

As a healthcare professional who has working in abortion care, I welcome the fact that this draft Bill will position termination of pregnancy as a healthcare matter, as opposed to a criminal matter.

I believe that the Bill addresses a number of barriers that are being faced by women in both metropolitan and rural setting and, as a General Practitioner, I also believe that the Bill will provide certainty for healthcare professionals as to the legal status of terminations of pregnancy.

#### Barriers faced by women in rural Queensland

As a doctor who is dedicated to working in rural Queensland, I believe that debate of this Bill also needs to be accompanied by an understanding of the issues faced by women in rural areas.

Queensland is Australia's second largest state in terms of landmass. There are limited to no services for abortion care to the North and to the West of Townsville.

This means that patients often, even if not travelling interstate, are required to fly to Townsville from places like Mount Isa and Cairns. It is not unusual to have patients from the Cape or inland drive for up to 8 hours to access our services at Marie Stopes Australia. Such travel impacts significantly women including on their financial situation as well as placing pressure on them to find alternative care for their existing children while they access termination of pregnancy services.

Additionally, women living in rural areas may not have access to ultrasound services prior to attending our clinic in Townsville which means we often see patients who have presented to us at later gestations than they originally thought.

I believe, as does Marie Stopes Australia, that law reform discussions must also be coupled with a collaborative approach to addressing the barriers faced by women accessing termination of pregnancy services in rural Queensland. This will require a partnership approach between public and private healthcare and allied health services.

**Dr Freyja Page**

**Marie Stopes Australia, Townsville**