

Queensland Council of Unions

Honorary President: **Rohan Webb** General Secretary: **Ros McLennan** Assistant General Secretary: **Michael Clifford**

5 September 2018

Mr. Rob Hansen
Committee Secretary
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence
Prevention Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
By email health@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr. Hansen

Re: Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018

The Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) is Queensland's peak union council. The QCU provides this submission in support of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018.

The QCU has for many years been at the forefront of advancing women's issues in this state, including women's reproductive and sexual health. The current antiquated statutes concerning termination of pregnancy have an inordinate impact on women and are therefore discriminatory. This submission is made on the basis of the QCU promoting an agenda of equality for women in all aspects of their lives.

The first point that needs to be made is that the QCU and its affiliated unions express disappointment that this debate needs to continue into the year 2018. A debate that has been settled in the arena of public opinion for decades continues to be drawn out in Queensland. Other comparable jurisdictions have dealt with termination of pregnancy and moved on. Not modernising the laws concerning termination of pregnancy risks Queensland continuing to be seen as a backwater despite decades of progress in other aspect of public policy.

There is no place for termination of pregnancy in the Criminal Code. Termination of pregnancy is a health issue and should be treated accordingly in the eyes of the law. The existence of termination of pregnancy in the Criminal Code is, as submitted by the Women's Abortion Rights Campaign, a hangover from a time when direct discrimination against women was the norm. Advances in the area of protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and workplace discrimination have emerged whilst the outdated concept of criminalisation of abortion remains in place, much to the shame of the Queensland Parliament.

The fundamental principle upon which our position is framed is that a woman has the right to control her body. Decisions made in relation a women's sexual and reproductive health is a decision best made by that women. It is the choice of the pregnant woman to decide whether or not to terminate that pregnancy. It is a decision that the pregnant woman will best make in consultation with her medical practitioner having regard to her circumstances.

Accordingly, our response also urges against overly prescriptive provisions in any legislation that might govern women's rights. If the decision is made by the pregnant woman in consultation with her medical practitioner, in our opinion this is the appropriate decision-making process. Not an overly legislated narrow set of criteria.

We also note that some consideration is being given to providing a safe zone around places where terminations are conducted. The QCU supports this concept, the principle of protecting the wellbeing of the individuals involved in a termination, including health professionals. As is pointed out in the Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union's submission, protests against termination become a workplace health and safety issue for those performing or assisting in the process.

Our position also acknowledges the distinct possibility that women in rural and remote areas might not be afforded the same access to medical services as women in urban areas. We advocate for the rights of the pregnant woman and her access to safe and legal health services wherever they live. Matters such as conscientious objection should also be subordinate to those fundamental rights, particularly in areas where women's access to GP's is limited.

We are pleased the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 is before Parliament and this committee and look forward to the end of abortion being dealt with as a matter in the Criminal Code in Queensland.

Please contact Women's Officer Kaylee Campradt on 07 [REDACTED] to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely



Ros McLennan
General Secretary