

Queensland Teachers' Union

Health Commission's Inquiry into the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018

September 2018



The Queensland Teachers' Union represents 45,000 members working in state schools and TAFE institutes throughout Queensland. The QTU is committed to protecting and enhancing public education in this state by representing members, including classroom teachers and school leaders, on industrial and professional matters. We are a union that represent a feminised workforce (76% of our members identify as female). Our union has long held policy that recognises the right of every person to control their own body, including their own fertility. This right includes access to adequate health and counselling services, and the removal of all restrictions to a safe termination.

Nearly every community throughout Queensland, has a school. Our coverage is truly state-wide. Our members work closely with parents, children and young adults in all communities, including those most disadvantaged and remote.

We believe that the existing, current legislation unfairly and unreasonably restricts access to safe terminations, and that remote and impoverished women are disproportionately impacted. Access to appropriate and timely health care should not be dependent on where you reside.

The Queensland Teacher's Union welcomed the release by the Queensland Government on the 15th July of the Queensland Law Review Commission's Report into the review into the state's termination of pregnancy laws and the Introduction of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 into the Queensland Parliament on the 22 August 2018.

Like the Premier, the Queensland Teacher's Union recognises that this is an important health issue for Queensland women, and that these recommendations will modernise and clarify the legislation for Queenslanders. We welcome the finding of the QLRC that found terminations should generally be treated as a health issue rather than a criminal matter and this is reflected in the Termination Of Pregnancy Bill 2018.

With almost 1200 submissions received and considered by the QLRC the Queensland Teacher's Union were pleased to have the opportunity to provide input in the process, we acknowledge and are appreciative of the wide consultation in the process to date.

Currently health professionals providing pregnancy terminations face possible criminal proceedings in undertaking this crucial work. We acknowledge and support the proposed legislation given the clarity it will provide for medical and health workers.

In our initial submission to the Queensland Law Review Commission's Inquiry we indicated that we did not support the right for medical practitioners to have the capacity to conscientiously object to performing medical terminations, given the disproportionate disadvantage this would have on regional and remote women. We believe that balance has been provided in the proposed legislation protects the right of health practitioners to conscientiously object to performing or advising in relation to a termination by the requirement to have to refer the woman to another health practitioner who does not have a conscientious objection.

As unionists we strongly hold the view that it is unacceptable that health workers are exposed to insults and harassment from people who protest terminations in their workplace, or at entry and exit points. Clearly, it is unacceptable that people needing to access health services would be exposed to any harassment. The QTU is strongly supportive of the inclusions of safe zones and support the inclusion of the establishment of a 150m safe access zone around premises where termination services are ordinarily provided. This protects the person seeking a termination from unwarranted and harmful harassment, and additionally protects workers at their workplace.

We support the proposed legislation, The Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018, as it seeks to decriminalise terminations, and further treats terminations as a health issue rather than a criminal matter. This

legislation seeks to provide a much-needed health service to Queenslanders, and thus removing a remaining, and significant barrier to genuine gender equality in Queensland.

When a woman is unable to make her own choices regarding her fertility or body, there is no gender equality. We believe this is legislation is long overdue, and that Queensland must adopt modern legislation that reflects the progressive views of the majority of Queenslanders.