

At present, my family is eagerly awaiting the arrival of my sister's baby in December – the first of the next generation in our family and cause for much excitement. Since hearing the news of my sister's pregnancy, I have been following with interest, the week-to-week development of the foetus. At week eight, I was amazed to discover that it already had fingers and toes, and was developing taste buds. Even at this early stage, it was already recognisable in the human form and developing unique features and characteristics.

With regard to the Labor Government's 'Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018', I wish to express my vehement opposition to the proposals being put forward. As a woman of child-bearing age, I must surely be afforded an opinion on this subject since I belong to the demographic that will be severely impacted if laws are subsequently passed. The Bill is being introduced with the primary objective that the termination of pregnancy should be treated as a health issue, and not a criminal matter. The reasons for my opposition to this Bill and its objective are outlined below:

- The Bill allows abortion on demand up to 22 weeks for any reason. It is seriously immoral to take the life of a child, and to legalise this for any reason is an abhorrent.
- There are numerous cases of unborn children with spina bifida and other various conditions undergoing surgery whilst in the womb. This enables surgeons to correct defects or perform interim procedures on a foetus so that it can remain in utero until it has matured enough to survive delivery and neo-natal surgical procedures. Surely, if this surgery can be undertaken, then it is an acknowledgement that an unborn baby has a right to life and that it is worth saving even before it is born.
- Further to above point, if an unborn baby's life is worth saving with surgical intervention, then it must surely be considered a criminal act to terminate the life of an unborn child for any reason. Abortion destroys the fundamental human right to life.
- Abortion in Queensland is already accessible, with 14,000 pregnancy terminations occurring every year. Decriminalising abortion is not necessary, as no woman has ever been convicted for having an abortion. However, by abortion remaining in the Criminal Code, this serves as a necessary deterrent to doctors, and as a moral compass within society.
- Abortions not only end the lives of unborn children, they can also result in physical and psychological problems for women. I have heard first-hand accounts of women who have undergone an abortion and continue to suffer psychologically as a result. There is clear evidence that up to 1 in 5 women suffer serious, prolonged psychological trauma following an abortion, such as depression and anxiety.
- In many cases, women have had an abortion against their will, due to coercion from a partner or family members. Abortion coercion is a form of domestic violence with abusive partners forcing women to abort their babies because they do not want the financial obligations of raising a child. Under immense pressure, vulnerable women have succumbed to the coercion to have an abortion, which further perpetuates the cycle of domestic violence. Women not only continue to suffer the effects of domestic abuse, but are also psychologically scarred from undergoing an abortion that they didn't want in the first place. It is often not a woman's choice to have an abortion.
- The Bill does not provide safeguards for women seeking an abortion such as independent counselling, a requirement for informed consent, and a cooling-off period. The lack of these safeguards in the Bill does not assist a woman in making an informed, independent decision at a crucial time.

- According to a YouGov Galaxy poll conducted in August 2018, 88% of Queenslanders agree that women seeking an abortion should have free, independent counselling prior to making a decision. Such counselling should include information on the development of the unborn child, the nature of the procedure, physical and psychological risks, and support available should the pregnancy be continued. There should be a requirement that the counselling is mandatory, and received from a professional who is independent and not associated with an abortion clinic.
- The Bill allows abortions to be performed at taxpayer-funded public hospitals, and therefore, would be accessible for free. The availability of free abortions for any reason in a public hospital would lead to a higher abortion rate, and more women being harmed as a result. This will put further stress on an already overcrowded public health system.
- The extreme abortion bill would allow abortions beyond 22 weeks gestation, up until birth, even for social reasons if the approval of two doctors is received, although the second doctor does not even have to see the woman or look at her file. Further, there is no penalty if the abortion is performed without a second doctor's approval. For a baby to be aborted after 22 weeks is particularly shocking, since some babies are viable outside the womb at 22 weeks gestation, even though the recognised point of viability in Australia is 23 weeks. Only 6% of Queenslanders support abortion after 23 weeks (including just 3% of women), with 76% opposed. This is according to a YouGov Galaxy poll conducted in August 2018. Based on these figures, why is the Labor Government proposing such extreme legislation when it's only supported by a tiny minority of extremists within the community?
- Doctors who have a conscientious objection will be forced to refer a woman seeking an abortion to another doctor who will be able to facilitate her request. This will make the referring doctor complicit in the outcome, and it is a violation of the right to conscientious objection and a doctor's obligation to recommend what is in the patient's best interests. This is likely to force some doctors to leave the medical profession, as well as deter new doctors from entering. This could lead to a shortage of doctors, resulting in irreparable damage to Queensland public hospitals and regional health services.

Based on the above points, the termination of pregnancy can have devastating health effects on women, as well as negative societal impacts. Society is seriously amoral if it is accepted that an unborn child's life can be so violently and abruptly terminated at any stage up until birth. For the Labor Government to introduce this horrendous Bill to Parliament is barbaric, and has little regard for women, men, families, and the most vulnerable – the unborn children who cannot speak up for themselves, and rely on members of society and elected representatives to protect them.

A far more beneficial change of policy would be for Government funding to be significantly enhanced to include pregnancy counselling services which offer real choice and support for women, including post-abortion counselling.

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