

Queensland Parliament Health Committee, Parliament House, George St, Brisbane Qld 4000.

September 4th 2018

RE: TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL 2018

Dear Committee Members,

I understand that this is a very sensitive and complex issue but as a woman, a proud Queensland born and raised and a wife and mother who has given birth to three beautiful children. I have experienced those around me who have been impacted by all sides of this issue and therefore believe I have some perspective with which to share my thoughts. I would respectfully ask that you consider the following letter as a submission in consideration of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018.

I must admit when I first discovered the extent of the changes this bill will make to the existing abortion legislation in Queensland my breath was taken away, I felt a real sense of extreme sadness and find it utterly morally reprehensible that the life of unborn persons could be so easily be taken for any reason right up until the point of birth.

Abortion no matter how defined involves the taking of a human being's life at their most vulnerable stage of life, whether people wish to recognise that legally or not, this still remains a fact. All of us were babies in our mother's wombs before we were born, helpless, defenceless and voiceless. It should not be a trivial matter and there should be adequate barriers and safeguards in place for all parties involved. That the QLRC made its recommendation to treat abortion generally as a health matter ignores the moral, spiritual and psychological aspects of this issue. Abortion is not just any health matter it is a complex matter involving the taking of human life.

All abortion legislation current or proposed makes no consideration of the biological father's wishes and rights to how their unborn child is treated. Let alone the consequence of changes to this legislation that could mean that abortions could be performed on babies who have reached a state of viability after 23weeks. This is a great injustice and ignores the many men who are denied an opportunity to raise their children and must suffer in silence because the right to see their child born is ignored. We now live in a society that accepts single male parenthood and this is a viable alternative that has been very largely ignored. How is it that the rights of the woman are elevated above that of the unborn baby and the father?

Late term abortions are currently rare in Australia because they are illegal. This does not mean that women will not access them for non-medical reasons once the legislation is passed, experience overseas has shown women can and often do have late term abortions for non medical/ non life threatening reasons.

Medical issues aside, all abortion legislation current or proposed ignores the fact that women who are faced with unplanned pregnancies are not given adequate counselling and financial assistance to overcome societal barriers and pressures to keeping their children as a first port of call. Can we be assured that women who choose the extreme option of abortion have been given all the support to consider keeping the baby before they feel that they need to obtain an abortion?

Those proposing this legislation are purporting to have women's rights at heart but at the same time it is difficult for me to fathom why there are no adequate safeguards within this legislation that match the extreme nature of the consequences of its being carried out to its fullest extent. If we were truly serious about assisting women who are faced with this difficult decision why is there no

mandatory independent counselling and assessment from a source external to the clinic. Information given regarding all of the alternative options available and cooling off time periods. Will doctors be required by the legislation to provide a full explanation of the procedure and all possible risks associated?. If it is purely a health matter than it should be a requirement that the woman be made fully aware of all that the procedure entails so that they can make a fully informed decision.

Perhaps in tandem with the reform of this legislation efforts be made to balance the other side of the equation and allow easier access to, promotion of and facilitation of adoption as an appropriate alternative to non-medically related abortions in QLD. If abortion is truly just a "health matter" then why does the indirect consequences of this legislation allow for a woman to abort a baby for social reasons such as sex selection or financial matters which is what can occur within the framework of this legislation as long as two doctors have signed off. Perhaps to keep more in line with what is purely a health matter the legislation should be more specific about what the exact circumstances are in which an abortion to term would be allowable and keep them to purely objective, verifiable medical reasons such as risk to the life of the mother or undue suffering of the unborn child.

Considering that 95% of abortions currently performed occur in private clinics how can we be assured of the impartiality of the two doctors that can sign off on an abortion to term. Will they be purely inhouse doctors? Does anyone independent of the situation have the ability to make a determination about whether the abortion was necessary? Does the legislation include some method of review of the decisions these doctors make and ensure that all proper requirements to the legislation were met? Will the legislation require that both doctors meet with the woman and have checked her file?

I implore that consideration be made of any increased risks to catering for abortions past 22 weeks as you are dealing with some form of birth required, will there be proper review processes in place to ensure that women are safe? After having given birth 3 times I assume it is much more difficult to deal with the result of an abortion at 32 weeks than at 6 weeks? Surely there are increased impacts on the mental and physical health of a woman who chooses the option to abort a baby that has reached viability and gives birth to the dead child, that we currently cannot quantify in comparison to what occurs under current legislation? How does the new legislation cater for this?

Even more importantly; What about those babies that survive abortion attempts after 22 weeks and are born alive? This has occurred overseas and is a possibility when late term abortions are performed after the new legislation is passed? Are the babies guaranteed protection and the right to immediate medical attention, adequate facilities and transfer to a hospital? This is a grey area that the legislation does not address, who will police this since it largely occurs in private facilities by medical personnel that do not have a conscientious objection to the ending of a baby's life? Does the legislation adequately protect those babies who after being born alive are now legal persons? Does the legislation make adequate protection for the wellbeing of the unborn baby to ensure it is not subjected to undue stress and pain whilst the procedure is performed? These are the considerations that must be made when changes to the timing of allowing an abortion are made. The reality is the longer the pregnancy continues the more viable and aware the baby is. Modern advances in fetal research show that babies are much more aware and respond to experiences in the womb, more than we ever knew before, how are they being protected by this legislation?

Does the end result of the new legislation erode the recognition of a baby as a legal person after the stage of viability has been reached? For example, as a person who welcomes children and loves my unborn children, will I and my unborn child be protected if societies' opinion of personhood is

eroded via the decriminalisation of abortion? This is the slippery slope of unintended indirect consequences of altering legislation like this. Will I be protected from doctor's making decisions against my will if a pregnancy threatens my life, does the legislation protect women who would not agree to an abortion under any circumstances even emergency ones? Is my unborn child truly protected if someone wilfully harms me/baby for eg, via assault, drink driving etc, could courts use this legislation as precedent for not recognising the unborn child as a person? If this legislation is allowed how long before infanticide is decriminalised? how is there any difference between a baby 1 day before birth and 1 day after. These are deeper matters not being addressed especially if abortion is allowed for non-life-threatening reasons.

Although the proposed legislation does not compel persons with conscientious objections to perform or being involved in assisting in an abortion does it provide other adequate protections for them in other areas, will their medical licence be protected from the Australian Medical Association revoking it? Will their job be protected under the legislation? Can we be assured that they will not be coerced through other pressures bullying, preventing promotion/furtherance of career etc? Just because a doctor refers a patient to someone else does not mean that they no longer feel involved, if I were a doctor/midwife I would have a conscientious objection to referring them on to someone I know can complete their request, can the woman of her own accord not be responsible enough to seek out another practitioner who will perform her request on her own?

Although I don't condone, I believe that the current situation in QLD with the existing legislation adequately allows all women who seek to obtain an abortion adequate time to do so within the existing 22 week window. The need for extension of this until the point of birth in my mind has not been adequately established. The fact that women are already currently accessing abortions without prosecution and via taxpayer funding shows that there are no barriers to obtaining an abortion for those whom wish to access it. The stated aims of the decriminalisation reducing stigma does not change this fact. Will it really make women feel any better for having gone through with ending their unborn child's life simply because its been legalised? Does it make it morally right just because ink has been put to paper? What then? We allow the legislation to be changed, putting more women and babies at risk for what gain? What support will be provided if the women still feel guilt, shame, grief will they receive any assistance? how does this legislation help those who do regret their decision?

This legislation is unnecessary and its need has not been thoroughly established. Please refer to the YouGov Galaxy Poll results in the publication "What Queenslanders Really Think about Abortion"

[REDACTED] which I feel overwhelmingly shows that there has not been a significant request by the people of Queensland for this change. Rather it has been thrust upon us suddenly by those of certain political and philosophical persuasions.

This legislation by decriminalising abortion means our society is rubber stamping the ending of the life of innocent unborn children and that alone should give us pause to think it through a lot longer than we have. I truly believe that the unintended consequences of this legislation will far outweigh any perceived benefits. Thank-you for your time in taking into consideration my submission, please accept that I understand that this is a difficult process for you.

Respectful Regards, Mrs Kirstin Boal, [REDACTED]