

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Comr

From: Peter Rowe
Sent: Tuesday, 4 September 2018 9:41 AM
To: Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
Subject: New abortion bill

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the new abortion bill which I understand is to be put before Parliament in October this year.

I have no religious views. However, I hold grave concerns about this bill.

The bill in this form effectively provides for termination at will up to full term. It will not be difficult to find two doctors who agree to late term abortion.

Indeed I foresee that some GP practices will set up specialised units to deal with just this issue.

Strangely, this becomes a feminist issue once abortion at will is available.

I know that the issue of sex-selective abortion is hotly disputed by Government and that Government has been at pains to pre-empt any such arguments. I know too that this issue has the potential to be turned by into a race issue as it does invoke consideration of different cultural views as to sex-selective abortion. Nevertheless, the issue should not be ignored simply because discussion of the issue risks straying into difficult cultural areas. It is already apparent that this practice occurs now, even with the existing laws (I refer you to the recent article by the Age on this issue reporting on a recent study from La Trobe University). Unbalanced births between males and females will have consequences for society.

Secondly, I am concerned that women will be coerced by errant males to have an abortion in a wider range of circumstances. For example, if a husband and wife separated in the third trimester , the pressure brought to bear by the separating husband, seeking to avoid financial liabilities, might be extreme where there are no sanctions, criminal or otherwise, against that pressure. As a practising lawyer, I see the lengths that some men will go to in order to avoid responsibility.

Thirdly, I sense, from talking to friends who have had abortions (and those few who resisted pressure to have abortions) , that there is no mechanism to slow down the process and obtain advice as to alternatives from counselling services. We have cooling off periods and compulsory legal advice for some decisions such as entering into a retirement village lease or signing guarantee documents, but there seems to be no similar mechanism available to women who seem to be sometimes corralled into an abortion " process". I think that women should be given time to reflect and the option of expert counselling advice (paid by the state) before proceeding with an abortion. These are difficult decisions and go beyond purely medical decisions in my view. There can be long term ramifications for some women. I am not saying that women are incapable of making these decisions carefully and after deep consideration. However it is a vulnerable time for anyone who has to consider these decisions. Pressing "pause" for a day or two may provide a window to think and reflect before making such an important decision.

In summary, whilst I understand the desire to decriminalise abortion, I consider that the bill in its current form goes too far in the other direction. Far from protecting women, I am concerned that this bill, if it became law, would add to the pressure, direct or implicit, that many women are already under to have an abortion. I consider that, on nuanced and careful consideration, the bill in this form contains dangers for women and society more broadly.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Rowe,

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