

To the Committee Secretariat,

The criminal status of abortion in Queensland is a powerful injustice, and a key plank in the continuing inequality faced by Queensland women. In 2018 this must change.

I commend the Palaszczuk government and the Queensland Law Reform Commission for their thorough work and commitment to addressing this inequality through the *Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018*.

The criminalisation of abortion reduces women's equality in various ways, and it also has harsh and unfair impacts on the healthcare professionals who dedicate themselves to providing women with essential reproductive healthcare.

The criminalisation of abortion actively reduces access to essential women's health services. It creates powerful disincentives for healthcare professionals to provide services in the current uncertain legal environment. Even metropolitan Brisbane clinics are forced to fly staff in from interstate to meet the need of Queensland women for essential reproductive healthcare.

A Queensland woman seeking an abortion may be forced to travel a long distance and even interstate to access this service, delaying her procedure and drastically increasing the cost and stress she experiences.

It is unacceptable that under the current criminalised regime, a Queensland woman may be forced to identify as experiencing a dangerous mental health conditions in order to access essential reproductive healthcare. Each and every Queensland woman deserves to feel safe and in control of her life, and for this to be possible she needs to be able to access the full range of reproductive healthcare without discriminatory barriers.

For routine early terminations in particular, it is an unreasonable burden on a doctor to force them to sit in judgement as to the validity of a woman's decision about whether and when to become a parent.

A woman attending a clinic to seek an abortion or other reproductive healthcare is likely to be bullied, harassed and accosted by so-called "protestors". Every Queensland woman should be able to seek reproductive healthcare with safety and privacy, and her access should not be impeded or her dignity assaulted by people who feel entitled to sit in judgement without knowledge of her particular circumstances.

Similarly, every day, healthcare workers, including medical, nursing, counselling and administrative staff, are abused, obstructed and degraded while attempting to access their workplaces and provide care for women.

Only the creation of Safe Access Zones will serve to address these abuses, and I commend the thorough approach of the proposed *termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018* in relation to safe access zones.

As a woman who has received a high-risk diagnosis in pregnancy following a routine scan, I am personally appalled by the disconnect between the claims of anti-choice activists and the realities for women.

We know that when a woman seeks to access termination services later in pregnancy she is not, as claimed by anti-choice activists, simply "changing her mind" about parenting, but is facing an

agonising decision about whether to terminate a much-wanted pregnancy due to health challenges for her foetus or herself.

Despite living in Brisbane and having ready access to the medical specialists I needed for invasive testing and second opinions, it took several weeks before I was able to confirm that my son was in fact likely to be born healthy. I can only imagine the additional barriers for a disadvantaged, regional or remote woman in accessing this information within a limited time frame. This is why it is essential that 22 weeks be retained as the upper gestational limit before extra conditions be imposed, and I urge the Committee to so recommend.

Queensland women have been fighting for the decriminalisation of abortion and access to safe services for generations.

This issue will not go away until women can access the services they need without cruel harassment and the stigma of criminality, and health care workers can go about their work of providing essential healthcare for women unhindered by so-called “protesters” who simply want to shame and harangue them and their patients.

It will not go away until women can make the decision about whether and when to parent in conjunction with their doctors.

It will not go away until women facing heartbreaking diagnoses can access the care they need in dignity and privacy and without the barrier of criminality.

I wish to express my personal thanks to the members of the Health Committee for their work throughout the very extensive consultation processes relating to this issue, and my sincere appreciation to the Members of Parliament who will vote in favour of the *Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018* and so stand with Queensland women in their quest to be free to make their own decisions about their lives and their health.

Regards,

Ali King

Executive Member,

Queensland Labor Women’s Network

