

Marisol Pacheco

28th June 2016

Re: **Submission for the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee for the *Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill 2016***

Dear Committee,

I am a Social Worker and I am currently employed as Senior Practitioner for Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, in the sexual assault support and prevention program. I am an active member of the Queensland Sexual Assault Network (QSAN) and the Australian Solidarity with Latinamerica group as well as a number of other inter-agencies and committees. I have **twenty years of non-governmental sector experience** in the gender based violence field, in Australia and internationally, including providing trauma based counselling, court support and advocacy to women victims of sexual offences.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide input to reform the current laws governing abortion in Queensland.

I support **the removal of S224, S225 and S226 of the Queensland Criminal Code** and I respectfully make the following key points:

- Abortion is a safe and effective medical procedure
- Vulnerable, disadvantage and poor women encounter more barriers to accessing abortion, including language and systems barriers
- Healthy relationships education which includes sexual and reproductive health and coupled with easily and affordable contraceptives, have been proven to successfully reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies
- No contraception is 100% effective
- Women seek abortions for a myriad of reasons including financial and psycho-social reasons. Reasons such as: unstable relationships, domestic violence, being too young or too old, already having the number of children planned, medical reasons, being financially insecure, contraception failure, being homeless
- Incest or rape are not grounds to access a legal abortion under the current law which does not represent the majority of people's view.
- Young vulnerable women are at higher risk of being victims of incest or rape which can result in unwanted pregnancies. In my work I have accompanied young women to access abortion providers, mainly because the lack of support they often experience. I once supported a young woman living in a regional town, by driving her for 8 hours (return) to access an abortion clinic in Brisbane
- 1 in 4 Queensland GP's are anti-abortion (Marie Stopes International Australia, 2006) Medical professionals objecting on the grounds of their religious views should provide an appropriate referral and do so in a timely manner. These professionals are not being asked to perform an abortion but rather to provide a professional and fair referral. Only medical

professionals who are expected to perform an abortion should have the right to claim 'conscientious objection'.

- The current laws, S224, S225 and S226 unnecessarily criminalise women and abortion providers. Abortion is a medical procedure and does not belong in the criminal code
- Abortions should be regulated under a medical practice code, not a criminal code
- Most women who have an abortion go on to live a 'normal' life, with no complications
- Women with complex trauma backgrounds are at higher risk of having a negative experience of abortion. Specialist services should be available and offered
- 47,000 women die each year around the world from unsafe abortion (World Health Organisation, 2010). In my country of birth, El Salvador, abortion is illegal under any circumstance – women die from backyard abortions. Those who survive are made to feel shame and are stigmatised into silence. Women are unable to seek help if they need it. There are currently 14 Salvadorean women in prison after being accused of performing their own abortions. The women say they miscarried. Amnesty International has worked to free them and so far 3 women have been freed. Maria Teresa Rivera is one of them, to read more on her story go to: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/el-salvador-release-of-woman-jailed-after-miscarriage-a-victory-for-human-rights/>
- Decriminalising abortion is a measure of the status of women in a society

Please bring Queensland into the 21st century and in line with other states by removing S224, S225 and S226 out of the Criminal Code.

Yours truly

Marisol Pacheco