

Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right To Choose) Amendment Bill 2016

Personal submission to the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

Dear Committee,

I am writing to support the removal of abortion statutes from Queensland's Criminal Code.

I've worked for Children by Choice, Queensland's only independent all options pregnancy counselling service, for over eight years. In 2009, I founded Pro Choice Queensland, a statewide coalition of organisations and individuals supporting the decriminalisation of abortion, after a young woman in Cairns was charged for having an abortion. I also spent a number of years on the board of Reproductive Choice Australia, including two as Co President.

I mention my professional affiliations in the interest of full transparency and disclosure, but this is a personal submission to the committee inquiry into Rob Pyne's *Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right To Choose) Amendment Bill 2016*. It's informed by my professional experience in this area, but more so by my deeply held convictions around equality and self determination. It is also informed by the many, many personal stories I have heard from women who have chosen to have abortions, and my solidarity with them.

I'm one of them. I'm one of the estimated one in four Australian women who has chosen to have an abortion.

Laws criminalising abortion are outdated and have no place in modern Australia. I do not want my Queensland sisters to face the threat of possible prosecution for choosing to terminate a pregnancy, nor do I want the doctors who help us to be fearful of breaking the law. I was in the courtroom in Cairns when that young couple was tried and (thankfully) acquitted. It was a horrific experience and one I hope to never see repeated.

Queensland is one of only three jurisdictions where it's possible for women to be charged for an abortion. It's time to move this issue out of the Criminal Code and make it well and truly a health decision between a woman and her doctor, the way it is in many other Australian jurisdictions.

Laws criminalising abortion create problems in accessing services which have a far greater impact on women already experiencing disadvantage. Women in rural and remote areas, and women experiencing violence, are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to abortion access.

Unplanned pregnancy and abortion are a reality of women's lives. It's estimated that half all pregnancies in Australia are unplanned, and that over one in four Australian women will have an abortion at some point in their life. No contraceptive is 100% effective, and rates of violence and sexual coercion are high. No woman 'wants' to have an abortion, but safe and legal services need to be available when they we it best. Criminalising abortion prevents this from happening.

I am concerned that some women are attempting to induce their own abortion at home because they can't access a safe procedure, and that others are being turned away from public hospitals when requesting abortion for a pregnancy resulting from rape. This is not the Queensland I want to live in.

The majority of the population supports a woman's right to choose, according to reliable opinion polling. I believe that those opposed to abortion make up a tiny proportion of the population and their vocal opposition to change should not be taken to be representative of broader community sentiment.

Women in other states and territories of Australia have the legal right to choose abortion. I want women in Queensland to have the same rights.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Marsh

References:

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