

Submission to the Parliamentary Committee for Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention regarding the Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform in Queensland

Elizabeth Price

The Committee of Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform
Health, Communities, Disability Services and
Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

Dear Committee Members

I write to seek your endorsement of the repeal of the current laws existing around abortion in Queensland, codes 224, 225 and 226 to decriminalise abortion in Queensland, in line with similar law reform in other Australian states and territories.

I could write on this topic from many perspectives, as a practicing Social Worker of 26 years, as a friend, as a mother, as a sister-in-law to name but a few. I choose to write to you as a woman who has had two abortions, both here in Queensland. I do not think that either of my two abortions would have met the test for a legal abortion in Queensland as set out in the statutes of 1899, but I believe both of my decisions to be honourable. I believe that this is the case for the vastly overwhelming majority of women making choices to end their pregnancies. I trust other women, as I trusted myself, to wrestle with this all too common dilemma. As a state, both medical practice and the status of women in our society has advanced dramatically, and it is now well past time that our abortion laws caught up.

My first abortion was in 1993, potentially facing single parenthood, pregnant to man I barely knew. I trusted in my own capacity to take stock of my situation and weigh up what was important; to become a reluctant welfare dependant single mother, raising a child that would have no relationship with it's father, or have an abortion and continue to contribute to society until such time as my circumstances changed favourably? I trusted my self with this decision as I did the countless women I have supported around this same issue since. I was assisted by kind, compassionate and skilled medical staff to end my pregnancy at nine week's gestation by surgical abortion.

My second abortion was in 2005, where as a married woman with one child, I found myself again, pregnant unexpectedly and in circumstances that were far from favourable. Again I trusted in my own capacities to weigh up my situation. At the time our family business was seriously struggling to reman viable. My little family just about got by on my part time wage but I had no maternity leave entitlements. My marriage was buckling under the weight of this stress and my husband was adamant that a second child at this time would plunge him deeper into depression. So, continue with the pregnancy, returning to work at the stage the child was six weeks

old so they could be placed in day care (or declare ourselves bankrupt), and risk the breakdown of an already struggling marriage, or have an abortion, and plan for another child when our circumstances changed favourably? Again, I was assisted by kind, compassionate and skilled medical staff to end my pregnancy at nine week's gestation by surgical abortion.

Where is the crime in these two decisions? These abortion decisions, like the 10,000 others made by women here in Queensland each year are based on what is best and fairest and survivable. These decisions were based on my relationships and economic security, and were an expression of my obligations to those I already loved and cared about, and to principles of family life that I held dear.

Today's current law did not prevent me from getting my abortions. I lived in the south east corner of Queensland where courageous medical staff offer a quality service, with my nearest clinic only a couple of suburbs away. Sure, I had to run the gauntlet of the protesters outside the clinic and tick the right boxes on the admission form once inside. I had to pay, and line up a friend to collect me afterwards. And I had to live with the knowledge, that in doing what I believed to be best and fairest and survivable, I had probably committed a crime punishable with imprisonment as had the kind, compassionate and skilled medical staff who assisted me. There are approximately 230, 000* women in Queensland who have had an abortion between the date of my first abortion and today. Do they also deserve to be imprisoned, along with the medical staff who kindly provided the service to them? I think not. Our laws in this regard are clearly outdated and the need to modernised to reflect current community attitudes and expectations.

Stigma I can live with, but to be denied access to abortion as a consequence of current laws would have been unthinkable to me. Today's laws do impact on abortion access for Queensland's most vulnerable women. Many of my learned colleagues will have submitted extensive evidence of this to you as part of the enquiry. I believe in a Queensland where there is equality of opportunity and equity in health care access. Our current abortion laws stand in the way of this, and that is why it is imperative that they are changed.

Kind regards
Elizabeth Price

*This is a conservative estimate based on 10,000 abortions in 23 years.