

30/06/2016



Research Director
Health, Communities, Disability Services and
Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill 2016 and Inquiry into laws governing termination of pregnancy in Queensland

I am writing with regards to the above mentioned inquiry and to voice my support for passing the bill to decriminalise abortion in Queensland. I am writing to express both my personal and professional perspective that it should not be illegal to have an abortion in Queensland.

There are a number of circumstances which can lead to the need for termination, and I have never met a woman who made this decision lightly. In each case that I have come into contact with, the woman has spent a great deal of time considering her options both for and against continuing the pregnancy. I do not believe this is a selfish decision, as they are taking into consideration the future that they cannot provide for these unborn babies. I admire them for their strength in making this choice and following through, because I know they were doing the best that they could for the future of all parties involved.

I believe that if these women were to continue with their pregnancy, not only would their wellbeing suffer, so too would that of the child. Both the women and the potential children would be exposed to further disadvantage and social limitations such as poverty, loss of opportunity and income, continued control by abusive partners, and more likely to experience mental health challenges. These factors create further injustice and inequity for women.

And really, whose business is it if a woman wants a termination? Is it not a private matter which should not be impacted by legislation and politics? It is hard enough for a woman to come to that decision on her own terms without having to consider the legal, political and systemic implications that are outside of her control.

For the last 9 years, I have been employed as a counsellor at the Women's Health Centre in Rockhampton in the National Women's Program. I am writing from my professional perspective which is that of a social worker who aims to encourage social change, empowerment of personal choices, enhancement of wellbeing and upholds principles of human rights, social justice and respect for diversity.

Through my role, I have come into contact with women and young women in a variety of circumstances, who are experiencing challenges to their wellbeing, such as through poverty, mental health, involvement with child safety, disabilities, domestic violence, sexual violence, workplace issues, etc.

I have worked with women who have self-aborted because their partner previously refused to allow them to attend termination services, and who knew that having a child to a violent partner would mean that partner would be in their lives whilst raising that child. I have worked with women who have raised children of rape, and who have needed support in overcoming thoughts and feelings of resentment towards children who had no fault in their existence. I have worked with women who stay with controlling partners out of fear for losing bonds with children that weren't planned for, but whilst they love them dearly, they know that they will be forever tied to their partner. I have supported two women in the process of obtaining funds for terminations which was as a result of sexual assault. On one occasion, I attended a clinic with a woman who was getting a termination, who had not family or social supports, who decided that she could not provide the future that child deserved, particularly as her partner was incarceration, and displayed extremely violent and alienating tendencies toward her.

In supporting women in procuring a termination, both they and I become liable for charges. But I ask you this; is it not better to prevent what could be a life of further disadvantage before it is too late? Is it not better to limit the number of lives that are negatively impacted upon by an unwanted pregnancy that in the long term becomes a child who may also experience challenges to their wellbeing as a result of knowing they were not born out choice?

To reiterate: I do not believe that it is the right of law or politics to determine what is best for woman. Doing so does not uphold the human rights of women to have access to services for the purpose of a medical procedure which if not undertaken can lead to ongoing disadvantage, impeded wellbeing and does not uphold justice or equity for women. Furthermore, I believe that disallowing women to legally have abortions, particularly in the cases where pregnancy is as a result of sexual assault, domestic violence or even inability to ensure the child a secure and sufficient quality of life should be not be legally acceptable in our State in this modern day.

Thank you for your time,



Chantelle Smitheim
Counsellor
Women's Health Centre, Rockhampton