

Abortion Law Reform - Amendment Bill 2016

This submission is on behalf of the maternal and fetal medicine (Centre for Advanced Prenatal Care) unit at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

My hospital is the largest Queensland Health Tertiary unit and as part of maternal and fetal medicine unit, we service women who are diagnosed with fetal abnormalities in pregnancy. With such diagnosis, counselling regarding pregnancy options is provided, one of which is termination of pregnancy.

Currently in QLD, termination of pregnancy cannot be legally accessed for a fetal abnormality. It is performed only for serious maternal health issues, typically psychological.

Given, the stressful time for women who are faced with making difficult choices with their pregnancy, its important modern laws make this service easily available and accessible. Because this service is technically illegal in QLD not all not all Obstetricians and Gynecologists are happy to offer termination of pregnancy.

With ongoing advances in genetics and imaging, there are increasing numbers of late diagnosis of fetal abnormalities. There are genuine indications for late termination in pregnancy after 22 weeks of gestation, a rare indication offered by only 3 subspecialty units in QLD.

We would strongly urge for a system that works well and transparent and include fetal abnormalities in the law rather than maternal mental health. The decision is clearly between the patient and the doctor or doctors involved in her care to terminate the pregnancy if there is a fetal abnormality. Late gestational age termination of pregnancy needs to be strongly addressed as with modern imaging some abnormalities will emerge or become clearer as the pregnancy advances.

Decriminalising the abortion law would provide a safe and supportive environment where the provider and the patient are comfortable without the element of pressure that they can be penalised for practicing what; in other states is routine.

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