

To: Inquiry Secretary, HCDSDFVP Committee, abortionlawreform@parliament.qld.gov.au

From: Dr Irene Alexander,

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." - Mahatma Gandhi

The question of termination of pregnancy relates to our beliefs about the value of human life, and at what age we consider a child (including an unborn child) to be a human being.

As a society we, in Australia, would generally consider the value of human life to be very high, being signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is reflected in our protection of life, the medical response to save the life of a child born prematurely, and the punishment of someone who commits murder – even murder of an unborn child. Our termination of pregnancy policies, legal principles and laws should reflect this high value we place on human life.

While different states place a different timeline for considering when termination of pregnancy is legal, whatever the time set (16 weeks or 24 weeks etc), it should be clearly before the baby could survive by itself. If a baby's life can be saved even when born prematurely at 24-28 weeks, this reflects our valuing of that child, and our termination of pregnancy laws should reflect this also.

Certainly factors around the danger to a woman's life can be taken into consideration.

Because there are differences in people's moral beliefs, health providers should be able to make choices about their involvement in termination of pregnancy. The Hippocratic oath reflects nearly two thousand years of western medical practitioners' commitment to doing no harm (and even specifically abortion). For those who consider a foetus to be an unborn child, a human life, they should certainly be given the choice to maintain their commitment to not harming that life.

When women are given a chance to explore their own responses and those of others to their pregnancy, in a context of confidentiality and no judgement, they are more likely to make decisions in keeping with their own highest desires and morality. Counselling which does not try to persuade the counsellee, but allows exploration of issues, is essential for a person who is facing questions about termination. Research has shown that when women are well informed of the actual development of the foetus, they are much less likely to choose an abortion, women should be fully informed about the facts of the choice they are making.

Personally I find the argument about a woman's right to choices about her own body, spurious. Of course women – and everyone, should have a right to make choices about their bodies. But an unborn child is not a part of the woman's body, it is a new life growing within her body. As a woman who has experienced the wonder of another human being growing within my body, I am convinced that we are called to protect that new life, even at high cost to ourselves. Of course it is our choice, but how we treat the weakest, most vulnerable members of the human race, is a measure of our humanity.