

June 30, 2016

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

Dear Sir/ Madam,

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

As a concerned resident of Australia and Queensland in particular as well as in my capacity as Project and Business Leader of The Women's Health Centre Rockhampton, I support the Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill 2016 especially the move to decriminalise abortion and to give women the right to choose access to abortion based on her own beliefs and values. Reforming the law to make abortion pro-choice is not only necessary but also timely for the following reasons:

1. As the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner and many other human rights bodies around the world have been advocating, access to abortion is a matter of human rights; ensuring access to these services is part of any State's obligation to eliminate discrimination against women and to ensure their right to health. Hence, criminalising health services that only women require, such as abortion, is discriminatory and a barrier to women's access to health care. Furthermore, denying women access to abortion where there is a threat to the women's life or health, foetal anomaly or where the pregnancy is the result of sexual assault, domestic violence (where high rates are found in Australia and Queensland) or incest "*violates the rights to health, privacy and, in certain cases, to be free from cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.*" (Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, [REDACTED])
2. Unplanned pregnancy along with abortion is indeed a reality for Australian women. Statistics compiled by Children by Choice indicate that half of all pregnancies in Australia are unplanned with the majority of these happen to women while using contraception. Studies have shown, including by the World Health Organisation that no contraceptive is 100% effective. At least one in four Australian women will have an abortion at some point in their life. This means the existing law has a negative impact on over a quarter of the female population in Queensland.
3. In view of the existing law which criminalises abortion in Queensland, many women have approached private clinics (In Queensland, 1% of abortions are carried out in private hospitals whereas 99% are in private facilities) to get the abortions done, which cost a lot more and are hard to find especially in regional and rural areas. This exacerbates the situation and has led to many other issues including some women resorting to self-abortion particularly those who are victims of sexual assault or domestic violence and who are disadvantaged, marginalised and come from low socio-economic backgrounds.

4. The current abortion law in Queensland is clearly archaic and needs to be reformed to reflect the realities and needs of humanity. Reforming the law in particular to decriminalise abortion and to make it a woman's right to choose not only reflects the State's firm belief for a just and gender equal society with equal access to basic human rights, including health rights for all but also a progressive Queensland moving along with its counterparts South Australia, Northern Territory, Western Australia, ACT, Victoria and Tasmania, who have already reformed their abortion laws.
5. Whilst this freedom to choose is given to the individual women, safeguards should always also be put in place to prevent any abuse of the law.

Yours faithfully,

***Shirin Dharmalingam***  
Project & Business Leader  
The Women's Health Centre Rockhampton