

Submission to the Parliamentary Committee for Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention regarding the Inquiry into amendments to the Health Act regarding the regulation of the abortion provision.

Elizabeth Price

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

Dear Committee Members,

I write again today as a Queensland woman who has had two abortions in this state as I did in my previous submission to the Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill (Submission Number 801).

I continue to support the decriminalisation of abortion in Queensland, and the repeal of sections 224, 225 and 226 from our 1899 Criminal Code. I believe that the proposed reforms laid out in the Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill will address community and committee concerns. I read closely your report into the Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill and remain confused about your recommendation that it not be supported. Your conclusions about the evidence presented to you read in support of reform. I note that the changes to the Health proposed changes to Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill align strongly with Option 5 as outlined in your report into the decriminalisation of abortion. To that end, I support both the Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill, in conjunction with the Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill. In the interest of good governance I urge the Committee to strongly recommend that both bills are debated and voted on together

on the floor of Parliament, to reflect the intent of the bills as companion legislation.

Abortion on women more than 24 weeks pregnant: the evidence presented in your enquiry into the Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill shows that there are many licensing, policy, ethical and procedural safeguards in place in respect of gestational limits in current abortion provision. From this standpoint gestational limits in the bill seem unnecessary. It does however do two things: it inshrines gestational limits for Queensland women and addresses strong community concern expressed about the issue of gestational limits. As such I support this section of the proposed amendments of the Health Act.

I am supportive of the inclusion of a **conscientious objection** clause. I was fortunate not to encounter an anti-choice Doctor in my times of need but recognise that Doctors already sit in a position of power in relation to the patients they see. I can imagine how much additional stress this would place a woman under if she was not assisted with appropriate onward referral. It is highly stigmatising and potentially obstructionist for a Doctor to not refer on. I believe this section could be strengthened by the inclusion of a legal requirement for a conscientiously objecting health care practitioner to refer the woman on to some one they *know* will assist them.

The inclusion of **safe zones** in the bill is a very important matter. As a Queensland woman I have had to endure navigating protesters on both occasions that I accessed an abortion, (1993, 2005) an experience which added to the burden of stress and stigma, and remains with me to this day as one of the most stressful aspects of my experience on the day of my procedures. One rainy early morning in 2005 I was dropped off more than 100 meters away from the clinic I attended. There were protesters not only at the entry of the clinic with their polystyrene boxes of fetus models but some distance away as well with pamphlets. The protesters at distance easily picked me out as a woman on her way to the clinic. I remember the kind words of the clinic staff who reassured me once I was safely inside. As you can see from my experience a protected zone of 50 metres would not have provided me with a clear path. This has also been the experience interstate as discussed in this news article

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[REDACTED] I urge you to consider extending this zone to at least 150m and to make sure this is not at discretion of any one person. We have, in recent history, seen Ministerial discretion and veto at state and federal level used to hinder abortion access. As such I urge the committee not to leave this power in the hands of one, but to enshrine safe zones within the amendments to the act.

I believe in a Queensland where there is equality of opportunity and equity in health care access. I support both the Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill and the Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill as important steps in this direction.

Kind regards
Elizabeth Price

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