

Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016**Personal Submission to the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee**

Dear Committee,

I support the decriminalisation of abortion in Queensland, and the repeal of sections 224, 225 and 226 from the *Criminal Code 1899* (Qld).

I recognise the concerns expressed by the Committee that a blanket repeal lacks sufficient legislative guidance for health practitioners, women, and community members. I believe that the proposed reforms presented in this new bill will address those concerns, and provide appropriate frameworks for the provision of abortion to Queensland women if passed in conjunction with the *Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill*.

I commend these additional amendments sought as conducive towards women's health and wellbeing, and clarity for health professionals.

The continued criminalisation of abortion compromises accessibility of services, the availability of information, and a woman's ability to negotiate a system which currently straddles both criminal law and health services provision. Criminalisation of abortion suggests that women are incapable of making the right decision for themselves and require State intervention in their lives. Queensland's current abortion laws ignore the many and varied valid reasons women have for choosing abortion, including the failure of modern contraception, as well as the profound detrimental impacts of forced continuation of pregnancy.

There are alternatives to criminalisation, including regulating provision through health legislation such as the proposed amendments in this *Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016*.

I would encourage the Committee to consider including a provision that while medical practitioners are able to conscientiously object to providing a termination, they must in such circumstances refer their patient to a practitioner or service who can provide accurate information or provision of services. We are often encouraged to accept our doctors' word as expert and final, often without seeking a second opinion. This is particularly important for women who are experiencing domestic violence where any time outside of the home must be accounted for and explained away or justified to the satisfaction of the perpetrator. Multiple visits, especially unnecessarily so, are not practical or safe and act as a significant barrier to safety for these women.

It is vital for the ongoing equality of women to be able to choose whether, when and how many children to have. This ability is integral to women's equal participation in life – social, professional, political and familial. I believe this is a common held value, and opposition to such choice is held by a small, but loud, minority. In actively following social media over the

last few months alone and the number of stories regarding Queensland's own abortion laws, but also the controversial proposals in Poland, have shown that while many comments oppose abortion in any circumstances the majority do not. And those comments that support women's choices overwhelmingly have more "likes" and agreement than those against choice.

I look forward to a future where Queensland women can access free choices regarding their bodies without judgment. But until then, I look forward to a Queensland where women can access their choice for abortion without threat of criminal penalty.

I support the *Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill*, in conjunction with the *Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill*.

I urge the Committee to recommend both bills are debated and voted on together as a package on the floor of Parliament, to reflect the intent of the two pieces of legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding this Bill.

Kind Regards

Katherine Kerr

References

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