

Dear Members of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

I am writing to **oppose** the *Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill* put forward by MP Rob Pyne for the following reasons:

1. the Bill fails to recognise that a child dies in every successful abortion
2. the Bill dangerously seems to allow women to carry out abortions on themselves (**Section 20.3**)
3. the Bill would allow children who are capable of surviving birth to be aborted, children between 21-24 weeks gestation (**Section 21**)
4. the Bill does not require doctors to comply with the rules for **Section 21** regarding children over 24 weeks gestation
5. the Bill allows unrestricted abortions for any reason for children under 24 weeks gestation
6. the Bill does not require women considering termination to be fully informed about the abortion procedures, about the development of their child, or alternative options to termination
7. the Bill prohibits people offering women legitimate help and hope near the entry of an abortion facility.

I discuss these further below.

1. The Bill fails to recognise that a child dies in every successful abortion

The reason that abortion restrictions existed in the Criminal Code at all is because it would have been recognised (even back in 1899) that a child dies in an abortion.

If a human life was not being killed, then having an abortion would be no different to having a mole removed, and thus no criminal laws would be required as it truly would be a simple medical procedure up to the woman – her mole, her body, her choice.

But because abortion does result in the death of a separate human being, there needs to be very good reason for this to occur. Neither Bills proposed by Pyne affords this. Rather the original sections of the Criminal Code were the only thing that afforded any protection to these vulnerable human lives.

2. The Bill dangerously seems to allow women to carry out abortions on themselves (Section 20.3)

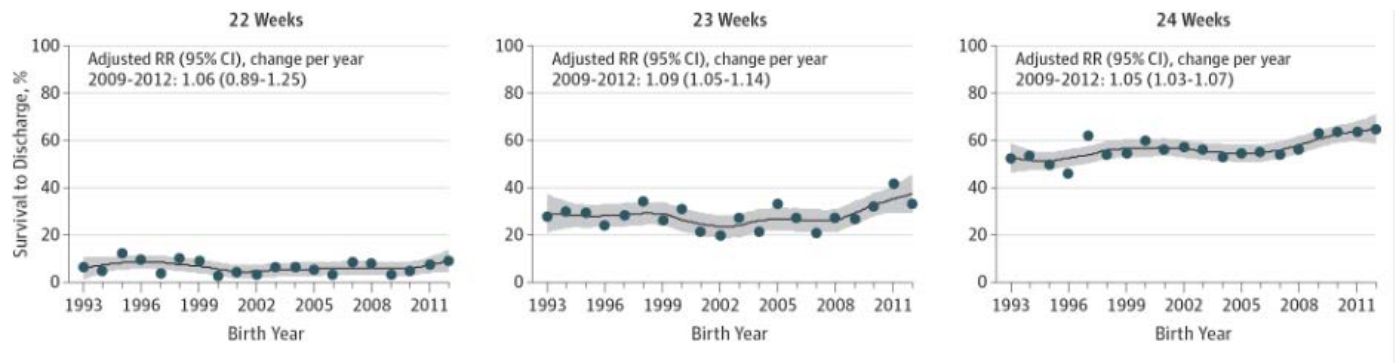
The wording of **Section 20.3** dangerously seems to imply that women can legally perform an abortion on herself without assistance from a doctor.

3. The Bill would allow children who are capable of surviving birth to be aborted, children between 21-24 weeks gestation (Section 21)

There is no restrictions provided for abortions of children under 24 weeks gestation. This means children between 21– 24 weeks gestation could be aborted on request, which is a gestational age where it is possible to survive birth.

Survival rates for very early premies (micro-premies) continue to improve as technology improves. Below are graphs showing “Infant Survival to Discharge Rates” from a recent study of “**Trends in Care Practices, Morbidity, and Mortality of Extremely Preterm Neonates, 1993-2012**”





Total number of infants (mean [range] per year): 1550 (77 [48-96]) for 22 weeks; 3133 (156 [122-189]) for 23 weeks; 4762 (238 [151-334]) for 24 weeks. **Note: In this study 22 week infants are counted as those born between 21 weeks and 22 weeks.** The study found that survival increased most markedly for infants born at 23 and 24 weeks' gestation.

- The youngest ever premmie was **James Elgin Gill**, who was born at **21 weeks and 5 days old** in 1987 (he is now 29 years old). He weighed 624 grams at birth.
- Amillia Taylor** was born at **21 weeks and 6 days old** in 2006. She weighed just 283 grams at birth.
- My girlfriend knows a family of triplet girls born at 23 weeks who are now 5 years old.

These children should not be so easily targeted by the high gestation range Mr Pyne has provided for abortions on demand. Abortions at this age limit should be for life-saving reasons only.

Women requesting abortions at this age for other reasons are facing some a social crisis which requires social assistance and care, not medical intervention. We must as a society and government encourage her and give her life-affirming help without allowing her desperate plea to end her pregnancy to fix her social crisis.

4. The Bill does not require doctors to comply with the rules for Section 21 regarding children over 24 weeks gestation

The proposed Bill has a note that says that doctors do not need to comply with **Section 21**. I do not understand how this is a requirement that has no penalty if breached.

Children OVER 24 weeks gestation have a high chances of surviving birth, and there is very few reasons that a child of this development would need to be killed.

In cases of the life of the mother, induced labour and birth is actually faster than abortion procedures at this stage of pregnancy. Induction abortions are a two-four day procedure, as explained on this website

"Induction Abortion | What You Need to Know": [REDACTED]

5. The Bill allows unrestricted abortions for any reason for children under 24 weeks gestation

There is no restrictions provided for abortions under 24 weeks gestation.

Fetal development images show us that a child inutero from about **8 weeks gestation** already has the form of a small human begin – head, limbs, eyes, **beating heart**, fingers, toes, nose, lips, ears. While only about 3cm long from head to rump, they are so well formed.

From 8 weeks gestation the unborn is classified as a "**fetus**" (Latin for "offspring", which of course means "child" – a human fetus is a human offspring is a human child).

Their organs mature as they grow, but they maintain their human form from this age onwards. How can we allow children already formed like this to be terminated upon request for no medically necessary reason. Again, social problems are not justification for aborting these children. We need to give better life-affirming options, not

At the Public Briefing on 14 September 2016, Mr Pyne suggested that he did not think “that a healthy, viable foetus would be aborted over hair colour or gender”. While I agree on hair colour, SBS recently did a report showing evidence of gender selection abortion in Australia cultural communities:

“Could Gender-Selective Abortions be Happening in Australia?”

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/08/17/could-gender-selective-abortions-be-happening-australia>

Another news story tells how a Victoria GP, Dr Mark Hobart, was asked by a couple to terminate their 19 week gestated daughter as they wanted a boy:

“Couples expecting girls 'demand abortions' because they want boys, say obstetricians”

Without restrictions on these earlier stage pregnancies, people will have abortions for any and all reasons if they are allowed to.

6. The Bill does not require women considering termination to be fully informed about the abortion procedures, about the development of their child, or alternative options to termination

A termination is not like any other “medical procedure” – it will result in the permanent (completely irreversible) death of a child, so the mother must be very carefully counselled about her decision to ensure she understands the full gravity of her actions. I have heard too many stories of regret by women who feel they did not get enough support and information, and felt pressured towards an abortion.

It is troubling that women the Bill does not have any requirements that women are fully informed of what they are getting themselves into when they choose abortion.

In the US, Texas law mandates that women seeking an abortion must be given an informational pamphlet on abortion and then wait 24 hours before undergoing an abortion procedure. This pamphlet was created in 2003 and is now being updated to reflect more current knowledge of fetal development and the effects of abortion. The new pamphlet was made publicly available by the Texas Department of State Health Services on June 28th.

Titled “A Woman’s Right To Know” this is a great booklet that contains a lot of useful information for women considering abortion.

Something similar should be produced and provided for women in Queensland.

7. The Bill prohibits people offering women legitimate help and hope near the entry of an abortion facility.

“Sidewalk counseling” is where prolife counselors seek to communicate with those entering an abortion clinic in an effort to persuade them not to have an abortion. The proposed 50m limitations restrict these counsellors from approaching women entering the clinics. This is not fair as I have heard stories of women who changed their minds after receiving such counseling.

While I agree threatening or harassing protestors should be prohibited, loving counselors who only wish to prevent them and their child hurt should not be barred. The purpose of sidewalk counseling is loving outreach to women, and is the last attempt to offer them help before they do something they will regret.

More about the practice of sidewalk counseling:

I will leave you with Nancy's story – a woman who had a change of heart when approached outside a abortion clinic in Melbourne:

My name is Nancy and I am the 46 year old mum of my beautiful 18 month old daughter, Ava, who was born in August, 2011.

I had two daughters, 10 and 7 years, when I ended my third pregnancy. I was coerced by my partner, who made it clear that he was not committed to me and was not sure about our future together.

Unsure of what to do, I was offered counselling at the hospital, but it in no way assisted me to keep my baby. I received no information about the development of my baby and pregnancy and was not offered any other option. The counsellor just sat there listening to me talk about how I didn't know what to do. Although I was obviously distraught, she did nothing, other than to say that after a termination I would feel better.

"BETTER"?! It's been 13 years and I feel cheated that I know nothing about my baby – I don't even have a picture. No one cared enough to help me or my baby! My life changed from that day, I just wasn't the same person anymore.

I was not informed that I could suffer long term depression and anxiety, which has negatively impacted on my quality of life – on my marriage, family & fertility.

After two more years with my second partner, we married, and were delighted to have a planned pregnancy. Our obstetrician informed us of all the risks and we had all the routine tests done.

We were devastated to learn that our baby had Down Syndrome and I was again coerced by my husband & doctor to terminate – all I remember is them again telling me it was for the best. The doctor said that the procedure would be a curette. I was not given any time to think about what I wanted – to let this information sink in. Again I felt pressured and hurried into aborting my baby. I was 14 weeks pregnant. I was so devastated words cannot explain.

Since then I have learned that, at 14 weeks, my baby was not just a "bunch of cells", (which abortion providers say to make it easier). My child had a heartbeat, fingers and toes!

After my second abortion, I suffered from infertility for years after, I went on to have three miscarriages and my depression worsened, resulting in the collapse of my second marriage.

No one understands the depression that sets in – I have cried silently for years, because I couldn't talk about it and because of the pain I felt when I saw babies and pregnant women.

Amidst all the despair I felt, I conceived a child in 2011 – an unplanned pregnancy and again, I was not in an ideal situation. And again I was being forced by the baby's father to terminate. He reminded me that he had said from the start he didn't want any more children. He became very abusive & violent.

I was in quite a state and very confused, so I booked to terminate, this time because I thought an abortion would stop his angry outbursts.

I agonized about going, but headed off to go again. But when I stepped out of the taxi, I was gently approached by an older lady who handed me a brochure. Her only words were "Do you really want to do this?" I burst into tears and said "No!".

I was comforted and counselled by them and they put me in touch with a lady from Right to Life Australia.

I went on to keep my baby, but it became necessary to get an intervention order on the baby's father.

If not for the pro-life advocates outside that abortion clinic that day and the advice they offered about other options, I would also have ended that pregnancy – and my beautiful daughter would not be here today.

People speak negatively about the “protesters” at the front of abortion clinics – but these lovely people saved me and my baby. They genuinely helped me pre and post birth and dedicated their time and care so generously.

I’m so glad they were there for me! I still suffer some grief and believe I will always be this way because you cannot erase the hurt caused by abortion.

But my baby Ava is like a special gift from the heavens. Words cannot explain how protective I have become of her from that traumatic time until now . I try so hard to overlook all the grief and problems and just enjoy every experience with her .

I have enjoyed every single moment of my precious child that I was blessed with. She is a gift of total love! Ava makes me a better person – she is my sunshine.

~ Nancy’s story, published at 

(I know Nancy through Facebook and her beautiful daughter Ava is now 5 years old)

Thank you for considering my submission

Malessa Brisbane