

The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNODModerator
Rev David Baker

6 October 2016

Inquiry Secretary
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention
Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

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

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod (Queensland Synod) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the new amendment Bill introduced on 17 August 2016 by Mr Rob Pyne MP.

The views expressed in the Queensland Synod's submission to the former inquiry on abortion law remain our position, however we wish to emphasise several points of particular relevance to this new amendment Bill.

Cut-off point for late abortion

We note that Mr Pyne is recommending 24 weeks as the cut-off point for late abortion. We are particularly uncomfortable with this suggestion as babies born at 24 weeks gestation are routinely treated and supported. Even babies born at 23 weeks gestation are supported if they are born alive. A Victorian government website¹ states that "two thirds of babies born at 24 weeks gestation who are admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) will survive to go home". A pamphlet from the Western Australian government states that the survival rate of babies born at 23 weeks who are admitted to NICU is approximately 60 per cent, rising to 80 per cent at 24-25 weeks².

In setting the cut-off point for late abortion, the degree of viability of the foetus at different stages of development must be considered. There should be a difference of some weeks

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, *Premature babies*, State Government of Victoria, [redacted], accessed 4.10.2016.

² Women and Newborn Health Service King Edward Memorial Hospital, 2014, *Birth of Your Baby at 23 to 25 Weeks*, Department of Health, Government of Western Australia, [redacted], accessed 4.10.2016.

between the cut-off point for late abortion and the minimum age of a viable foetus, and we suggest that twenty weeks would be a reasonable point.

We reiterate our conviction that late-term abortion should only be conducted in situations where the mother's life is seriously at risk or the foetus has impairment of such severity that they will be unable to survive.

Freely available abortion prior to 24 weeks

The Queensland Synod is opposed to the principle that abortion be performed on-demand at any stage of gestation. We believe abortion should be available for women whose health – physical or mental – is at significant risk, with professional assessment of her needs and good counselling and support provided.

The rights of the foetus

The Queensland Synod notes that the new legislation makes no reference to the rights of the foetus and focuses solely on the rights of the mother. We reiterate our belief that the rights of both must be balanced. This will be difficult to achieve, however we believe that it is important to invest the time working on a reasonable balance.

Mr Pyne's comments


We note that the explanatory notes for this Bill state that "The Bill seeks to clarify when care can be imparted and to avoid prolonged approval and ethics processes, not conducted for the benefit of patients' wellbeing but to substantiate lawfulness³". The Queensland Synod believes that the approval and ethics processes referred to above are fundamental when the issue is indeed an ethical, moral and frequently spiritual matter. Such processes are essential for the protection of everyone involved and for the community in general.

Patient protection

The Queensland Synod supports Division 3, sections 23, 24 and 25. The privacy and safety of everyone involved must be protected.

As the committee is aware, the issue of abortion is an important one for the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod. We are happy to engage in further conversation or to assist the inquiry in any way possible.

Yours sincerely



(Rev) David Baker
Moderator

³ Mr Rob Pyne, 2016, *Introduction to the Health (Abortion Law reform) Amendment Bill*, Queensland Parliament, 17.08.2016, [REDACTED], accessed 4.10.2016.