

Wendy Downes

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

4 October 2016

Dear Madam/Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016. I would also like to thank Mr Rob Pyne MP, the Member for Cairns, for having the courage to bring this Bill to Parliament. Women in Queensland have been able to vote for over 120 years, yet they still risk being charged under the Queensland Criminal Code 1899 for making choice about their own bodies and caring commitments. Having a baby is bigger than just pregnancy and birthing. It is entering into a caring role requiring a physical, emotional and financial commitment for the rest of your life.

While I understand that this Bill does not decriminalise abortion, it takes a positive step toward enabling women and couples to make safe and informed decisions about their lives and the lives of those they care for. The Bill removes current ambiguity by:

- in Section 20 ensuring that abortion is safe by stipulating that it can be carried out by a qualified medical practitioner; and
- in Section 21 provides clarity for the late term pregnancy terminations .

Late term pregnancy terminations are particularly important for women and couples who discover that the child they have conceived, if born, will require high care. In most instances the characteristics of high care can only begin to be detected at 11 weeks and often not conclusively determined until after 13 weeks at the earliest. Having a child with high care needs is a lifetime commitment that may be needed well after the parents have died. This means that the decision about bringing a child with high care needs into the world not only affects you, the parents, it affects those you already care for and the community that will need to support you in caring for a high needs child.

Making decisions about a pregnancy termination is difficult and personal and the process is emotionally and physically painful. I was fortunate that I had professional, non-judgemental and compassionate care in a hospital. I am also fortunate that I did not have to face anti-abortion protestors. Anti-abortion protestors will not stop a woman making a choice about a pregnancy termination, but they make a difficult and personal experience more challenging. For this reason I support Sections 23, 24 and 25 in Division 3 of the Bill that enable protestors to have their say, but

monitors their behaviour and provides protection to women who have made the difficult decision to terminate their pregnancy.

Section 22 of the Bill is also respectful. It provides doctors and registered nurses with a choice about performing an abortion, if the mother's health is not seriously threatened.

This Bill provides choices for everyone. If you do not believe in abortion, you are not obligated to have one or perform one. However, if you are considering having an abortion, this Bill ensures that you can make an informed decision in a safe way with the support of trained medical practitioners.

This Bill, if it becomes an Act, will bring Queensland into the 21st century by providing clarity for medical practitioners and enabling women to make informed decisions about their lives and the lives of those they care for.

Again I thank you for the opportunity to have a say about a topic that is not generally discussed in our community. There is a very vocal anti-abortion lobby and because of this I find it difficult to speak of my personal and painful choice to have an abortion.

In considering Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016 I urge all members of Parliament understand that this Bill caters for all personal beliefs by providing clarity, choice and respect for all women and medical practitioners in Queensland.

Kind Regards

Wendy Downes