



Speech By  
**Charis Mullen**

**MEMBER FOR JORDAN**

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### **TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL**

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (6.21 pm): I rise today to make a contribution to the debate on the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. I do so from the perspective of a mother, a Christian and a legislator. I do so with the strong belief that I have thought deeply on this important issue before us—I have questioned and I have listened. I do not come to this with any sense of triumph because abortion is not something to celebrate. It is sad and deeply personal. It is a decision made that may or may not leave a scar. I believe it should be rare but I believe even more strongly that it should be legal and safe.

I am the mother of two beautiful daughters. I had two very wanted pregnancies. For those of us who have had the enormous privilege of carrying our babies, we know just how special it can be. I also have experienced the fear. Recalling the night before we were due to get the results of our 20-week scan with our first child, my husband and I spoke of those fears—the ‘what if’, the scenario of a significant or terminal diagnosis.

We know that abortion after 22 weeks in Queensland is rare. The data is clear and shows that it is just over one per cent of all terminations performed in Queensland. We also know that the 18- to 20-week scan is the first point at which many severe foetal anomalies can be diagnosed, including health problems deemed ‘incompatible with life’, where there is no chance of the birth of a healthy baby or a baby is expected to die shortly after birth. I have met mothers who have made the very difficult decision to terminate their deeply wanted pregnancies, not because they changed their mind as some people continue to believe but because of these tragic diagnoses.

The testimony provided to the parliamentary committee by Ms Zena Mason was particularly poignant and captures why we need to review these laws. She said—

The people who comment and tell me that I should have continued are behind their keyboards writing their comments, but they are not there supporting the families, they are not providing the funding and they are not helping me keep my marriage and myself together, along with supporting my daughter if she were here ... If this is passed and that in the future we get to make the choice that is best for our own circumstances, whatever they may be, I hope that I would not have to feel like a criminal and be called a murderer for what I did, because I can assure you that we already live with the pain every single day.

What is best for our own circumstances, whatever they may be, has been an important guiding principle for me through this debate. I am not pro abortion. I would struggle to find anyone in this House who is, but I do not believe that my personal view on abortion, whatever that might be, should guide me here today. What guides me is the belief that an individual woman must make that choice, must make that decision for her own circumstances—whatever they may be.

I have a strong sense of faith and belief in God. It has guided me through some difficult times in my life. Mark 12:31 states, ‘The second is this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ That sounds easy enough, but it gets tougher when you realise that ‘your neighbour’ is not just the person you go to church with or agree with or look like. I will not judge another woman for the decision that she makes but I will give her the right to make that decision for herself. That is the greatest love I can show my neighbour.

Importantly, I take my role as a legislator very seriously, as I know all of the members in this parliament do as well. I want to acknowledge the significant review undertaken by the Queensland Law Reform Commission of the current laws relating to the termination of pregnancy in Queensland. I believe the review, which garnered over 1,200 submissions, and the recommendations put forward by the QLRC have led to the legislation before us and provide us with a clear path, in particular, that in Queensland termination is to be treated as a health issue rather than a criminal matter by repealing sections 224, 225 and 226 from the Criminal Code; ensuring a woman's autonomy and health is recognised, particularly in the early stages, whilst also acknowledging the more complex nature of later stage terminations; and providing safeguards for women and medical practitioners in the implementation of the law, including conscientious objections and safe access zones.

I believe, despite stories to the contrary, that the majority of Queenslanders support reform in this area, that the majority of Queenslanders do not want to see over 10,000 women who have had a termination in Queensland in the last year sent to prison as is the ambiguous nature of the current law. I certainly do not believe that the majority of Queenslanders want to see women who are having to make some extraordinarily sad decisions regarding their babies made to feel like criminals.

I wish to thank all of the individuals and groups who have contacted me regarding the issue of abortion—those who have opposed the legislation and those who have as fervently supported it. In particular, I am grateful for the opportunity to have met with a number of church groups in my electorate. Whilst we did not necessarily agree, I am thankful for the respectful and calm manner in which we were able to discuss all aspects of the legislation. I would also like to thank my electorate staff, Fran and Rose, for their support.

This has been a very difficult issue for me. I do not pretend otherwise. I have seen some comments that voting for this legislation is somehow more about career advancement than the issues at hand. I reiterate what I said at the beginning: I come to this from the perspective of a mother, a Christian and a legislator. I do this for all women in Queensland to ensure that terminations will be legal and safe and I do this for my daughters. Whilst I pray they never need to access a termination, I want to ensure that they have the choice.