




Speech By
Joan Pease

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (12.30 pm): I would like to begin by praising the Attorney-General for asking the Queensland Law Reform Commission to review and investigate the modernisation of Queensland's termination of pregnancy laws and I commend the QLRC for the comprehensive review that it has undertaken. The Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 represents the culmination of a substantial body of work undertaken by both the 55th and the 56th Parliament, canvassing professional bodies, interstate government departments, health practitioners, churches, women's support and community groups as well as individuals. These experts have all contributed to this bill. I praise the Palaszczuk government and the Minister for Health for addressing this important women's health issue.

I acknowledge the work of the committee secretariat, the many submitters and witnesses and my fellow committee members. I thank the secretariat, who provided outstanding support to the committee. I thank my parliamentary colleagues: chair, member for Thuringowa, Aaron Harper; deputy chair, member for Caloundra, Mark McArdle; member for Maiwar, Michael Berkman; member for Pine Rivers, Nikki Boyd; member for Nicklin, Marty Hunt; and member for Rockhampton, Barry O'Rourke. I list them all because I would like to thank them for their respectful consideration and thoughtful deliberations and discussions in the committee process. I would also like to thank the many submitters and witnesses who have shared their views and stories with us. May I also take a moment to thank my electorate staff for their professionalism and commitment to the constituents of Lytton and to thank each and every member of my community for contacting me with respect to this bill.

The legalisation of terminations is today a vexed topic, but it is worth noting that termination of pregnancy has been widely practised throughout history. Its illegality, however, is a more modern construct. A 1500BC Egyptian medical text describes the use of plant fibres covered in honey and crushed dates to induce abortion. During the Middle Ages, most religious scholars accepted abortion up to the 'quickening', which is about four months into a pregnancy. In the US, up until the early 1800s, abortions were not only legal but widely advertised. By the end of the 19th century, however, laws in the Western world had been introduced to outlaw deliberate terminations, including in Queensland in 1899. These laws were designed to protect women from unsafe procedures, but they had unintended consequences where many desperate women turned to illegal practitioners. I mention the history to indicate the changes in society over time. Nonetheless, legalising terminations is still today controversial and, unfortunately, it is a debate characterised by misinformation and polarisation.

In reaching a position on this bill, the committee has heard a range of views from legal commentators, medical professionals, scientists, politicians, theologians, feminists, social scientists, community groups and individuals. In gathering these opinions we have heard diverse opinions from both sides of the debate, including extreme positions. On the one hand, we have those who believe unequivocally in the rights of the foetus. On the other hand, we have those who argue women should always have autonomy over their bodies.

I do not want to focus on those who take extreme positions because I believe that we can find common ground among the opposing sides if we choose to do so. For example, no pro-choice advocate would see abortion as a routine means of birth control or, for that matter, a tool to be used for gender determination, nor that abortion is a casual event undertaken without a moment's thought or respect for the potential life that is being ended. If we put aside the explosive opinions from the extreme camps and look for common ground, we can address this controversial topic in a more rational, productive and less divisive way.

I am asking all of those in the House to consider this bill from the perspective of the woman who seeks a termination. There is a woman out there right now considering one, and that woman's decision will be made in the context of her own complex and possibly conflicting social, moral, religious, political and economic values. We can try to put ourselves in her shoes but she does not have our lives, our problems, our options, our values or our experiences, so her decision is bound to offend or confound some of us whatever decision she reaches.

For all of those in the House today, my advice is to trust the woman. Trust her to make the right decision. Trust her to make the decent decision. Trust her to make the wise decision. I believe that she is capable of knowing what is right for her at this time in her life. I respect her and I respect her decision. This legislation allows women—women who are best placed and living the experience—to make appropriate health decisions about their body and their family. I commend the bill to the House.