




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (2.20 pm): I rise to support the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. I was very fortunate to grow up in a family home where everyone was welcome. My father was one of 15 and my mother, when she married my father as an 18-year-old, became a sister, cousin and aunty to a vast extended family. I always remember there being people staying at our home—sometimes just for a night, sometimes for a few days and sometimes for weeks, months and even years depending on the circumstances.

We had aunties travel from Far North Queensland to stay whilst they had their babies. We had uncles from rural Queensland stay to receive medical attention. We had cousins who lived with mum and dad for months on end whilst they studied at university. It was very normal to have people staying with us—something I proudly continue in my own home with my two sons.

When I was very young—maybe around six or seven—I was so accustomed to family and friends staying with us that it did not faze me when someone new arrived at the house. I gave up my bed and had the exciting chance to sleep in the lounge room, which was pretty normal. I had never seen this woman before and I have never seen her since. She was younger than my mother. She was a tall, smart and beautiful Indigenous woman.

I remember, however, that she had a terrible sadness about her. She cried a lot and even though she had all of us she seemed quite alone. I remember my mother comforting her and counselling her—seriously, that is my mum. Her story was a fleeting one in my life, but it is one that has stayed with me all my life. It is a story that formed my pro-choice position. She was staying at our house and travelling the next day to New South Wales to terminate a pregnancy because it was illegal in Queensland. My mum tried to explain it to me and I pieced the rest together by quietly reading the energy in my surroundings, as many kids do.

She had made an agonising decision. It was one that weighed heavily on her. She was not in this position because she was irresponsible or a terrible human being or a murderer or stupid or any of the things that those opposed to this bill would have us think about women. She had thought this through. She had received medical advice related to her own complex medical situation and she had reached a conclusion that this was the best choice for her.

As a small child I remember thinking how hard it must have been for her to be going through this so far from her family—how hard it must have been to navigate the judgement of others, to speak to medical professionals and to step into a very foreign set of circumstances. I should be clear. My mother, as a Christian woman, is by no means pro abortion. I do not think anybody is. We had been raised to show love and compassion to others, to check our assumptions and to avoid judging the decisions of others. That is how my Christian home raised all of us.

This bill is fundamentally about the right of a woman to make the best decision for her and her circumstances and it supports the fact that it is fundamentally a decision that is between her and her

medical practitioner, not anyone else—including the criminal justice system. The fact that we still have laws that belong to a time when women could not even vote, a time when a woman's body, her assets, her views all belonged to a male dominated structure is so far from what is considered a modern community's expectations.

I want to be part of a society that allows women choices, even if not everyone agrees. I want to be part of a society that values the relationship between a woman and her medical practitioner and I want to be part of a society that does not degrade, judge or condemn a woman for her choices. I want to be part of a community and a society that opens its doors and that shows love and compassion the same way my mum and dad showed love and compassion to that young woman all those years ago.

There has been a lot of information from multiple sources coming into my electorate office in the last few weeks. Some of this material has been incredibly distressing. Facts have been twisted and lies have been peddled in this debate. Every time I see this horrible, hateful material I think about that young woman who stayed with our family. I think about other women in my life who have been confronted with similar situations and how they have had to navigate a system that does not trust their ability to make informed and considered decisions. This legislation is about providing a full range of safe, accessible and timely reproductive services for women.

The Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 reflects the positions of informed healthcare organisations and stakeholders, including the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. It is consistent with other Australian jurisdictions and will bring our current law in line with contemporary and safe clinical practice.

This is a bill about dignity and respect. It is disappointing that we have not always seen that in this debate. I am personally appalled at the baseless attacks on my parliamentary colleagues. Every time I hear these kinds of attacks I think of myself as that six- or seven-year-old child and what I witnessed of somebody who had made an agonising decision. I cannot imagine that kind of hatefulness being pushed onto someone in that situation.

We are standing on the shoulders of countless women who have fought inside this place and in the community to get a common-sense approach to what is fundamentally a health issue. I pay my respect to these women who have worked tirelessly on this issue. This debate is charged and it is intense, but your voices are powerful. Your contribution is meaningful and your struggles are recognised. We would not be here today without the collective strength and resilience that you have all provided.

I want to also acknowledge the hard work of my colleagues—the Deputy Premier, the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General—who have navigated this very complex legislation through all of the emotions and the concerns that people have had. It has been a brave and outstanding approach to something that is really about human dignity. This legislation is historic. I for one am happy to support the bill and be on the right side of history for the sake of that woman all those years ago and all women who will go after us and have the opportunity to make dignified, informed decisions and not feel the brunt of judgement and harassment.

I cannot stop thinking about this woman. She has been on my mind from the beginning of this legislation. I think about her travelling from a very remote part of Queensland and being with a family that she only knew through relatives and what she went through. I cannot imagine what she would have faced if she had to go through what some women in Queensland have had to go through because of this archaic legislation. I do not want that for any other woman in this state ever again. I absolutely commend the bill to the House.