




Speech By  
**Meaghan Scanlon**

**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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### **TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL**

 **Ms SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (6.05 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill and, in so doing, I acknowledge the incredible women upon whose shoulders I stand today. Some of those women are in the gallery and I recognise their contribution towards this issue. For many years those people have campaigned to give women agency over their own bodies.

I am proudly pro choice and firmly believe that a woman should be able to make a decision about her own health, in consultation with her medical practitioner, without that being a crime. The laws that currently govern abortion in Queensland were written in the 1800s. To put that into context, these laws were written during a time when women could not vote, when we were denied a voice and when we could not forge a career. These archaic laws need to change.

Like many of my colleagues, I have been targeted throughout the debate for being supportive of a woman's right to have agency over her own body. I have had offensive and inaccurate materials distributed throughout my electorate. I have been asked multiple times by people opposed to this reform if I have had an abortion. I have considered sharing my story to debunk some of the myths that have been thrown around, but I have made the decision that, quite frankly, it is no-one's business.

Instead, I will say that in Australia it is estimated that at least one in four women have had an abortion. There are more than four women in this chamber, so statistically speaking at least seven women in this parliament have had an abortion, but we are not able to speak about the details of that decision because we would have committed a criminal offence. If our laws were enforced, many of us would not be eligible to sit in this chamber.

I ask a question of those who are opposed to this reform. Do those who are opposed to this bill believe that I or any other woman in this chamber should go to jail for making a decision about our own health? Do those opposed to this bill believe that a woman who has been raped or who has a non-viable pregnancy with a foetus that has no chance of being born alive should be incarcerated for having a termination? Any member who votes against this bill will be voting for many of the women I have just described to be subject to the Criminal Code. To those who have said that no-one has been prosecuted under these laws so we should leave them in the Criminal Code, I ask: if these laws are not being enforced, why do you have a problem with them being removed from the Criminal Code?

I have heard the slippery-slope argument and it is devoid of fact. There is no evidence from any other Australian jurisdiction or internationally that substantiates the claim that there would be a likely increase in abortions following decriminalisation. In fact, in Victoria we have seen a decrease. This bill will not increase late-term abortions and to say so is disrespectful to the many women who have shared their heartbreaking stories. This bill will not lead to sex-selective abortions. It will not allow women to terminate their pregnancies up until birth for any reason and women will not start using abortion as their preferred method of contraception.

Respecting women means respecting a woman's right to make a decision about her own health and respecting that we have the intellect to be able to make a sensible and informed decision that is right for us. All voting against this bill will do is continue to drive women into the shadows of seeking illegal and potentially dangerous abortions. It will continue to disproportionately affect women in regional Queensland. Keeping abortion in the Criminal Code will not stop abortions from happening. Women have always had abortions and they will continue to have abortions.

This bill is about bringing Queensland into the 21st century and bringing our laws into line with what is actually happening in society. It is about treating women and our medical profession with dignity and respect. I said in my first speech that I believe that our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. I have had hundreds of people in my community contact me in support of these reforms. I want to thank them for their contribution during this difficult debate. Women and men who are not ordinarily politically engaged have been sharing their stories with me.

One particular story that stood out the most was from an ex-soldier in Nerang whose daughter-in-law was harassed as she entered a private clinic. She had a wanted pregnancy that was nonviable, meaning the foetus had no chance of being born alive. No woman in this situation deserves to be harassed. Yet that is exactly what happened when she approached the clinic. This is one of the many reasons we want to introduce safe access zones in Queensland. I do not think that politicians or anyone in our community should sit in judgement of a woman whose shoes we have not walked in.

I have heard from a family who were given news that their foetus's lungs were not growing and that the prospect of survival after birth was minimal. This particular family chose to continue with that pregnancy and sadly the child died a few months after birth. They told me that they appreciated the fact that they were provided with a choice. That is ultimately what this debate is about. No member of parliament is forcing anyone to have an abortion. No-one is advocating for more women to have abortions. What we are saying is that women who need an abortion should not be treated like a common criminal for making a decision about their own health.

We live in a representative democracy, and I am very thankful for that. We are elected to represent the views of our community. I am a proud born and bred Gold Coaster and I am honoured to represent the community that I grew up in. I know that the overwhelming majority of my community supports this reform. A recent poll shows that over 70 per cent of Gold Coasters support the decriminalisation of abortion. Today I stand here advocating for the thousands of women in my city who deserve a voice in this chamber. We are one of the only jurisdictions in the country that still treat abortion as a crime. Even Ireland and America have legalised abortion.

This bill has been the subject of thorough consultation. The Queensland Law Reform Commission conducted a detailed and wideranging 12-month inquiry to inform its report, which included 1,200 submissions on its consultation paper from a diverse range of stakeholders. The committee then considered over 6,000 submissions on the bill as part of its inquiry. This issue has well and truly been considered and debated for many, many years.

We now have the opportunity to play a part in creating historic reform in Queensland. Reproductive autonomy is fundamental towards achieving equality. It is time that we get this done for the generations of women who have been fighting for the right to choose, for the women who have died as a result of illegal abortions, for the women who need safe access to abortion now and for the future generations of women. I commend this bill to the House.