

10 Minute Rule Bill - Decriminalisation of Abortion

Briefing for Wolverhampton Deanery

22/11/18

As you may be aware, on October 23rd, a cross-party 10 Minute Rule Bill to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks passed its first stage in the House of Commons. The bill was introduced by Diana Johnson MP (LAB) and co-sponsored by MPs including Sarah Wollaston (CON), Anna Soubry (CON), Norman Lamb (LDEM), Stella Creasy (LAB), & Caroline Lucas (GRN).

This bill seeks to undermine locally-elected politicians in Northern Ireland. As recently as February 2016, the Northern Ireland Assembly debated its law on abortion and rejected, by a clear majority, any legislative change. Indeed, of all abortion legislation across the UK, the Northern Ireland legislation enjoys the most recent democratic mandate. As a result of Northern Ireland's unique law and culture, it is estimated, using robust statistical methods, that over 100,000 people are alive to today in Northern Ireland because it did not enact the 1967 Abortion Act.

It is also of highest concern regarding the wider implications of the proposal brought forward by MPs which proposes repealing sections 58 and 59 of the *Offences Against the Person Act*. This is being presented by some as a move to introduce abortion access in Northern Ireland but, in reality, would introduce one of the most extreme abortion regimes in the world right across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There would be no law regulating abortion right through to viability, at least, if the sections 58 and 59 of the *Offences Against the Person Act* were repealed or right through to birth if campaigners also repealed the *Infant Life Preservation Act* in an eventual amendment, which would mean an abortion could be performed legally on any grounds, there would be no legal restrictions on places where abortions could be performed and it would be more difficult to secure convictions against third parties that have forced a women to terminate a pregnancy. The introduction of a radical abortion regime would also position us away from the rest of Europe where the median gestational time-limit for most abortions is 12 weeks.

I understand what an important issue this is for many people, particularly for those of us in the Catholic Church who seek to protect life. I ask that parishioners in our churches write to their Member of Parliament to ask them to vote against this bill (and all bills which have similar aims) at every stage. For ease, I have provided an example letter which can be used by those who wish to contact their MP which can be found attached. For further information, please see the links provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Aaron Humphriss

Useful Links:

To find your local MP:

<https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

For a full briefing on the issue:

<https://lifecharity.org.uk/proposal-to-repeal-abortion-laws/>

Example Letter (Provided by Life):

I am writing to you regarding the concerted effort being made in Parliament to decriminalise abortion. I hope you will oppose this bill from proceeding at any opportunity. However, an immediate law change following an amendment to an existing bill is also possible.

Proposed abortion legislation is leading us towards abortion on demand, legalised up to birth. Although it is not transparent and may not be intended, I believe this because legislation change seeks to:

- 1. Legalise abortion for any reason up to 24 weeks (as stated by Ms Johnson on 23 October 2018)*
- 2. Have no criminal sanctions for a woman procuring her own abortion at any stage in pregnancy (via amendment of section 58 of OAPA to state: an offence is only committed if the abortion, which occurs after 24 weeks, is performed by another party and repeal of section 60 of OAPA)*
- 3. Permit a woman to source abortion pills and terminate their pregnancy at home, and the nature of the internet now means this won't be difficult for her to legally achieve. (via repeal of section 59 of OAPA)*

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) who were named as supporters of Diana Johnson's bill, and whose trustee Sally Sheldon drafted the bill, are campaigning for abortion on demand to birth: "there should be no legal upper [abortion] limit" Ann Furedi, CEO, BPAS. Based on the dramatic increase of abortions in England since 1967 I believe that this will mean abortion becoming legally available up to birth for any reason without ramifications. Therefore I am urging you to stop abortion legislation being changed in any way you can.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]