

Dear [Colleague],

We, as a cross party group of parliamentarians, call upon our colleagues to recognise the urgency and importance of reforming our outdated abortion laws to put the safety and dignity of all UK women first. Together we view this not as a partisan issue, but a matter for the conscience of all representatives. By working in this way we want to show we can make progress on a matter of human rights for the benefit of all UK citizens.

The situation in Northern Ireland has highlighted to many the need for action to ensure the safety of women. In particular, we are concerned at the unequal treatment of UK citizens, with women in Northern Ireland unable to access abortion even in instances of rape, incest or fatal foetal abnormality. The prosecution of young women for seeking terminations via taking misoprostol and the thousands who now buy these pills online and so risk their personal safety further reinforce the need for legislation that can address modern healthcare methods.

We are also conscious of the clear evidence the people of Northern Ireland wish to see change; that they recognise the damage being done by these outdated laws and support reform across all faiths, political persuasions and age groups. Indeed, recent opinion polls show more than 70% agree that the issue of abortion is a matter for medical regulation - not criminal law.

The situation in Northern Ireland is rooted in legislation covering access to abortion which affects the whole of the UK and is now over 150 years old. Access to reproductive care is a human right for all women that enables them to make choices about their own bodies- including not to be forced to continue an unwanted pregnancy. The Offences against the Person Act was written in 1861 and makes it a crime for any woman to cause her own abortion; the 1967 Act offers exemptions to women in England and Wales. Abortion is the most common procedure that women of reproductive age undergo - in 2018 we recognise it is time that we act on behalf of all UK citizens to ensure they are able to their rights are protected and that our abortion legislation is fit for purpose.

Repealing sections 58 and 59 of this law for all of the UK would not impose any specific abortion law on Northern Ireland or any other part of the UK. Its absence would, however, enable civil servants and indeed the Assembly if reconstituted, to set out a framework for a modern healthcare system covering conditions of access. Far from overriding devolution, removing this archaic legislation from the statute creates the direct opportunity for each nation to update its abortion laws for the 21st century and so respects the devolutionary process.

We believe there is growing cross party consensus that change in legislation is required to enable modern laws to be enacted. We also recognise the referendum in Ireland itself has raised the urgency of showing the men and women of Northern Ireland that this situation will not be ignored; for the sake of all we need deeds not words. We wish to show that we trust all women with their own healthcare- wherever they live. We ask every representative to stand with us in calling for Parliament to consider the decriminalisation of abortion across the whole of the UK, and in doing so test the will of the House to act to repeal the OAPA legislation at the earliest opportunity.

With kind regards

Stella Creasy MP  
Labour and Cooperative MP for Walthamstow

on behalf of the following colleagues

Sarah Woollaston MP

Jo Swinson MP

Diana Johnson MP

Caroline Lucas MP

Liz Saville Roberts MP