



Minister Stephen Donnelly
Department of Health
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2, D02 XW14

21 June 2022

RE: Political leadership required to address concerning travel statistics for abortion care

Dear Minister Donnelly,

I am writing on behalf of the Abortion Working Group, a collective of reproductive health and rights advocates, to express our significant concern that women and pregnant people continue to be forced abroad for basic healthcare despite the landslide victory for Repeal. This is due to restrictions in our legal framework on abortion which must be addressed in this ongoing Review.

While the introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act has enabled abortion access for many in Ireland and this is to be celebrated, over the last three years, 775 Irish residents have been forced to travel to the UK and endure the stress and trauma that this entails.¹ Indeed, the just-released UK statistics give only a partial picture of denial of healthcare: we know that many women and pregnant people have had to take abortion pills without clinical oversight or support, while others have travelled to other jurisdictions.

When the public voted by a landslide for repeal of the eight amendment it was a clear statement that all women should to be able to access care at home and with the support of their doctors make decisions about their healthcare. We must be clear that the public voted to empower the Oireachtas to legislate for abortion and did not vote on the specific details of legislation.

The public mandate to provide abortion at home has consolidated and strengthened over time. Nationally representative public opinion data from February this year shows that support for access

¹ Significantly, the proportion of abortions for residents of the Irish Republic performed under ground E in England and Wales – ‘that there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped’ - increased from 32% in 2020 to 50% in 2021. This suggests that there are significant problems with access to abortion care in Ireland post-12 weeks on the grounds of fatal foetal anomaly laid out in Section 11, due to the 28-day mortality clause. As a Group, we recommend repeal of the 28-day limit and enable abortion on request up to viability to ensure that no woman or pregnant person is forced to travel abroad for essential reproductive healthcare.



to care at home has increased since 2018. Today 80% of the public say no woman in Ireland should still have to travel abroad to access abortion care compared to 72% in May 2021.²

The ongoing Abortion Review offers a unique opportunity to address barriers to access in line with the public's wishes, but also with women's and pregnant people's human rights. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that abortion care is provided for in law (and policy and practice) in a manner that respects, protects and fulfils people's human rights. A thorough review of the 'operation of the Act' as set out in Section 1,7 requires recognising and addressing not only aspects of current provision, but also the elements of the legal framework which are inhibiting access to care and forcing women and pregnant people abroad.

As Minister for Health, we are now seeking your assurance that where the evidence gathered in this Review process demonstrates that legal and policy changes are required, that you will commit to deliver these. The robust evidence-gathering process must be matched with political leadership and a commitment to swiftly deliver amendments to the Health Act to bring our law in line with WHO guidelines and international best-practice. We need a clear guarantee of your commitment to act on recommendations and a transparent timeline to ensure this process is not subject to further delays.

As women's health is a cross-party concern, we are copying all heads of parties into this letter and urge you all as our political leaders to signal your commitment to evidence-led legislative reform. We must ensure that the precious opportunity this Review presents is not wasted.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Orla O'Connor', is written over a horizontal line.

Orla O'Connor

Director, National Women's Council

Co-signed by the following members of the Abortion Working Group

Abortion Rights Campaign

² Opinions Market Research Omnibus May 2021, net agree 72%, base: n=944 compared to Omnibus Feb 2022, net agree 80%, base: n=863



Abortion Support Network

Action for Choice

Alliance for Choice

Amnesty International Ireland

Disabled Women Ireland

Inclusion Ireland

Irish Council for Civil Liberties

Termination for Medical Reasons and Leanbh Mo Chroí

Together for Safety

Women's Collective Ireland

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CC: Micheál Martin, Taoiseach and Leader of Fianna Fail

Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste and Leader of Fine Gael

Eamon Ryan, Leader of the Greens

Mary Lou McDonald, Leader of Sinn Fein

Roisin Shortall and Catherine Murphy, Co-Leaders, Social Democrats

Ivana Bacik, Leader of the Labour Party