

Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

15 April 2024

Dear Taoiseach,

We are writing to request urgent action by Government to ensure the full and effective implementation of the [Review of the operation of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) developed by Independent Chair, Marie O'Shea. This Review was published in April 2023, yet progress is awaited on many recommendations. Our call for immediate action is also reflected in the conclusions of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health, whose December 2023 [report](#) supports the Review's recommendations, describing them as necessary measures to ensure the 2018 Act meets the needs of women and called on the Government to advance their implementation without delay.

While we acknowledge efforts to improve operational aspects of abortion services in the past year – including 17 of the 19 maternity hospitals now providing care – significant barriers to equitable and accessible abortion services remain. These barriers include ongoing criminalisation, the mandatory 3-day wait, inadequate data collection, lack of safe access zones, uneven geographical coverage, and narrow rigid legal criteria for abortion access after 12-weeks; including the 28-day clause for fatal foetal anomalies. These obstacles have resulted in women and pregnant people being denied timely reproductive health care and, in many cases, being forced to travel abroad.¹

To address these barriers – this coalition of service providers, civil society organisations, academics, and other relevant stakeholders – are calling on the Government to take the necessary legislative and operational steps, beginning with:

- Full decriminalisation of abortion in line with [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) guidance](#) to remove the chilling effect on healthcare providers, ensuring that they can use their clinical judgment to care for people without fear of prosecution
- Remove the mandatory three day wait period, ensuring timely access to abortion care
- Review the 12-weeks gestational limit to ensure women and pregnant people are not timing out of care and forced to travel abroad for essential reproductive healthcare
- Recruit a HSE Primary Care Lead for Termination of Pregnancy to address gaps in training, guidance, and data collection for early medical abortions
- Expedite legislation regarding Safe Access Zones, ensuring swift implementation to protect the areas adjacent to abortion services

¹ At least 860 women travelling from Ireland to the UK to access abortion since the Eighth Amendment was repealed. Statistics released by the UK's Department of Health and Social Care show that 85 women gave Irish addresses when undergoing terminations in England and Wales in the first half of 2022.

The recommendations in the Review have a robust evidence base, rooted in qualitative research of the lived experiences of women who have accessed abortion services since the commencement of the Act. We call on the Government, who commissioned this Review, to immediately progress legislative amendments and service developments which accurately reflect the findings of the Review, the research underpinning its recommendations, and international best practice set out by the WHO.

The review clause was included in the 2018 Act in recognition that healthcare policies should never be frozen in time. The Government cannot delay the necessary legislative and operational changes any further, political leadership is urgently required to ensure Ireland's reproductive healthcare system is equitable and responsive to emerging evidence and clinical best practice so it can meet the needs of all women and pregnant people.

Kind regards,

Orla O'Connor, Director, the National Women's Council
Alison Spillane, Research and Policy Coordinator, Irish Family Planning Association
Richael Carroll, Co-Convener, Abortion Rights Campaign
Ailbhe Smyth, Action for Choice
Ciara McHugh, Senior Helpline Coordinator, Abortion Support Network
Maria Joyce, Coordinator, National Traveller Women's Forum
Karen Sugrue, Co-Chair, Together for Safety
Dr Marion Dyer & Dr Mary Favier, Southern Task-Force On Abortion & Reproductive Topics (START)
Stephen Bowen, Executive Director, Amnesty International Ireland
Luna Lara Liboni, Senior Policy Officer, Irish Council for Civil Liberties
Patricia Acom, Women's Support Officer, AkiDWA
Danielle Roberts, Co-convener, Alliance for Choice
Dr Catherine Conlon, Associate Professor Social Policy, TCD
Dr Lorraine Grimes, Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University
Dr Deirdre Duffy, Senior Lecturer in Sociology (Global Social Inequalities), Lancaster University
Dr Ruth Fletcher, Reader in Medical Law, Queen Mary University of London
Dr Kate Antosik-Parsons, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Social Studies, TCD
Prof Fiona de Londras, Barber Professor of Jurisprudence, University of Birmingham
Dr Camilla Fitzsimons & Dr Sinéad Kennedy, Academics for Reproductive Justice
Bernie Linnane, Leitrim for Choice

Copied to include:

Minister Micheal Martin, Tánaiste

Minister Eamon Ryan, Minister for Environment, Climate & Communications & Minister for Transport

Minister Stephen Donnelly, Minister for Health

Mr Robert Watt, Secretary General of Department of Health

Ms Linda O'Connor, Principal Officer, Maternity & Gynaecology Policy, Department of Health

Mr Bernard Gloster, HSE CEO

Dr Colm Henry, HSE Chief Clinical Officer

