



CARE
FOR WHAT
YOU BELIEVE



STUART WEIR
Director of
CARE for
Scotland

Gillian Mackay MSP
Room MG.15
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Thursday, 4 August 2022

Dear Ms Mackay,

Response to Proposed Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill

We are writing on behalf of CARE for Scotland to express our views on your proposed Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill. We would be grateful if this letter could be considered our formal response to your consultation.

CARE is a well-established mainstream Christian charity helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives. We have consistently sought to articulate a balanced and compassionate narrative on abortion over many decades. We also provide post-abortion counselling as well as support for those who have experienced miscarriages.

CARE for Scotland is not involved with protests or 'vigils' outside facilities where abortions are provided. We would condemn any behaviours that deliberately harass others, or actively impede freedom of movement. We are concerned by any behaviour which may compound vulnerability or distress for any woman seeking to obtain advice or access abortion services. All public debate around abortion, and especially interaction with expectant mothers, must be conducted with an abundance of empathy, compassion and sensitivity, recognising that both lives in a pregnancy have value.

We have concerns about how your proposed Bill relates to freedom of speech, specifically regarding potentially excessive restrictions upon the public right to legitimate and non-intimidatory protest and an inadequate balance of competing rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). We are especially worried about the proposed introduction of custodial sentences for so-called protesters, which sits uneasily with the notion

of Scotland as a free and open democratic society. It is also important to note that the term 'protestors' perhaps does not accurately capture the reality or motivation for many, who may be there to pray, offer support and provide an option for women who may wish to consider an alternative.

We are also concerned that by exclusively focusing public debate on 'buffer zones', your Bill risks obscuring more significant aspects of the wider abortion debate. We note, for example, that terminations are occurring at near record numbers in Scotland, and that the provision for abortions at home, introduced during Covid, are to be continued. As such, we fear that your Bill risks projecting a potentially misleading narrative that access to abortion services is being impeded, while simultaneously diverting attention from issues such as the termination of babies with Downs' Syndrome, advances in improving foetal viability, efforts to reduce the number of abortions from its current very high level, and wider discussions about drivers of abortion in Scotland.

Yours,



ROSS HENDRY
CEO of CARE



STUART WEIR
Director of CARE Scotland



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