Written submission from Mrs Lesley Bell (ANI0035)

- Submission in a personal capacity
- From an adoptive mother living in Northern Ireland
- Because I see ‘reform’ as taking away human rights of unborn children
- That the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland must be respected
- That the law as it stands has protected human rights and saved many lives
- That humans with disability have value and human rights too
- Liberalising abortion law would likely have meant that my children would have been denied life

1. I am writing to express my opinion that existing Abortion Law in Northern Ireland should not be changed. I write as a woman resident in Northern Ireland, an adoptive mother, and someone who has cared for special needs children in the Education System.

2. The will of the people of Northern Ireland has been clearly expressed by our elected representatives on multiple occasions. The opinion of the majority is that there is no need for reform of our law on abortion. This opinion crosses all perceived social and sectarian divides. It has protected the lives and human rights of the most vulnerable in our province. It is simply wrong that Westminster should try to undermine devolved decisions in the UK.

3. It is sad to see that the vast majority of abortions performed in Great Britain (98% in 2016) have been performed for “social” reasons. This was an inconceivable statistic when the 1967 Abortion Act was implemented. If this Act had applied to Northern Ireland over the last 5 decades it is no underestimate to say that tens of thousands of unique, valued and loved human lives would have been ended. It would have made the number of lives also needlessly taken in ‘The Troubles’ seem insignificant by comparison.

4. Working with children who have physical and mental disabilities was challenging but extremely rewarding. I saw their unique contribution to society, their sense of self-worth, and the love their families and carers had for them. It is simply inconceivable and an affront to their human rights to say that they would have been better off not being born. The value of their human lives cannot be measured.

5. Finally, as a woman who has faced the trauma of infertility, it is abhorrent to think of the lives of unborn children being needlessly taken. I have listened to the stories of those who have been persuaded to abort their children and live with the trauma of an act that cannot be undone. As an adoptive mother, I see past the challenges of parenting to the rewards associated with investing in the lives of children; watching them achieve their full potential and contributing positively to society. No-one will ever convince me that my children are “unwanted” or would have been better off killed before birth. They are loved and loving human beings that make this world a better place. And most importantly, they have human rights that trump social inconvenience by a large margin.