I would like to submit evidence on a personal basis. My name is Dr Amy Morrison. I live and work as a General Practitioner in Northern Ireland. In the course of my work I have interacted with people who have had to face immensely difficult circumstances on both sides of this issue. I have met patients who have chosen to travel to obtain abortion services in Great Britain for a range of reasons, including suspected foetal abnormality, and who have had to process the subsequent emotional consequences, patients who have children with significant life limiting conditions and who have to live with the major impact that this has on their family life and patients who have continued with pregnancies that were unanticipated. At the heart of this issue are always individuals who find themselves in circumstances that they would not have chosen and any response must keep this in mind and seek to be compassionate and empathetic. However, even in the face of this, I would like to propose that the current Northern Ireland legislation should remain unchanged. This is for several reasons as detailed below.

My personal moral and ethical world view is based on the Judeo-Christian position of the sanctity of all life and that life begins at conception. From a scientific and secular perspective these principles have also been laid out in the San Jose articles (found at https://sanjosearticles.com/?page_id=2) which were prepared by a range of scientific, legal, ethical and philosophical experts. It should not be forgotten that when discussing the human rights involved in this decision making process that there are two lives to be taken into account – both that of the mother but also of the child that is growing within her womb. This embryo/foetus is not just a potential human being, but rather a person in their own right with a new distinct genetic makeup and an inherent dignity as one formed in the image of God. It has been estimated that around 100,000 people in Northern Ireland today are alive because the 1967 abortion act does not currently extend to the Province. I know that this consultation is seeking to look predominantly at those cases that are most difficult such as rape and incest. There are people who have been born as a result of these circumstances who are alive today who can testify to the fact that they are glad their mother took the decision to continue with the pregnancy. The wrongdoing of another person is not undone, but rather compounded by authorising the death of one of the innocent victims. Also in the case of suspected fatal foetal abnormality there have been instances where the initial diagnosis has subsequently been found to be incorrect or less severe than initially thought. I have come across several patients in my career to date who have far exceeded initial expectations of lifespan and who have both experienced joy and brought joy to their families. This is admittedly not the experience in every similar situation but focusing on the most extreme difficult, emotive cases does not provide the basis for a robust legislative framework and current statistics in GB show that the vast majority (98% in 2017) of abortions were performed under clause C where continuing with the pregnancy was reported to be detrimental to the physical or mental health of the mother. There has been an exponential increase in abortions since the introduction of the 1967 abortion act and my fear would be that introducing legislation for some initial difficult cases could potentially lead to an ever
expanding liberalisation of the law and essentially to the introduction of abortion on demand where it is seen almost as another method of contraception rather than a life ending process. Northern Ireland is a devolved administration and, however dysfunctional that this is at times, I feel that this should be respected by Westminster. Any decisions to be made about abortion legislation should be debated by our elected representatives or be put to a vote by the people who live in Northern Ireland. In 2016, when this issue was last debated, a clear majority – across both sides of the political spectrum in both Unionist and Nationalist parties – were in favour of keeping the current legislation regarding abortion in Northern Ireland unaltered.

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