Written submission from Mrs Geraldine Corke (ANI0326)

In summary:
- this is not a decision that should be taken outside of Northern Ireland, but is the responsibility of the devolved parliament.
- The current law protects lives including those of the disabled.
- Human rights should be protected for both the mother and the unborn child.

1. This is a devolved issue which should be decided by politicians in Northern Ireland, not Westminster. The fact that the Northern Ireland Assembly is temporarily suspended should not change this. Such a move by politicians at Westminster would set a worrying precedent for other devolved assemblies, especially as such a politically uncertain time for the whole of the UK. Also I understand that recent polling shows a clear majority of adults in Northern Ireland show that this major issue should be decided by Northern Ireland (66% of women and 70% of 18-34 year olds).

2. The law on abortion in Northern Ireland has been proven to save lives. Research conducted by ‘Both Lives Matter’ in 2017 found that an estimated 100,000 individuals are alive today who otherwise would not be had Northern Ireland followed England, Scotland and Wales in adopting the 1967 Abortion Act. Complaints were made to the Advertising Standards Authority about this claim but after a 5-month investigation, involving health statisticians, the ASA concluded that the 100,00 figure was indeed reasonable. In addition, the law on abortion in Northern Ireland protects individuals who are disabled from unjustified discrimination. In England, Scotland and Wales, unborn children can be aborted up to term if a disability is identified in utero. In Northern Ireland, this is not the case. This makes a major difference. This, in effect, makes Northern Ireland the safest place in the UK to be diagnosed with a disability before birth and means that the disabled are not discriminated against in the womb.

3. It is important that both the human rights of both the mother and the unborn child are protected. I understand that the Supreme Court has recently indicated that the law in Northern Ireland is incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. However these comments were non-binding, and referred to two narrow points – those of life limiting conditions and sexual crime. Less than 2% of abortions carried out in England and Wales in 2017 were for these reasons.

I am concerned that the Women’s and Equalities Committee accepts the lie that women can only be equal when they have an absolute right to abortion in any circumstance for any reason. This pitches a women against her unborn child and measures their freedom, equality and progress by their ability to end the life of their own child. This is a dangerous and destructive way to view women and humanity more widely. Many women, men and children see a better and more human way ahead which values the life, health and dignity of both as far as possible.

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