Written submission from a member of the public (ANI0322)

Introduction: I am writing today as an individual to tell the Women and Equalities Committee my story about how our pro-life laws saved both me and my daughter.

Summary:

- My daughter is now 11 years old – a beautiful, healthy child.
- However, back when I was pregnant with her on my 20 week scan doctors detected what they called a cystic abnormality of the lung. The doctor told me there wasn't much hope, when my baby was to be born she could be stillborn or maybe just live a couple of hours due.
- The consultant told us that if she did live, she would never be able to do the activities of a normal child, however we rejected abortion.
- Parents like us in these cases could easily be advised to abort their children if the law does change.
- I had my beautiful baby girl who was born perfectly healthy with absolutely no problems to this day.

My testimony:

I am the proud mother to a gorgeous, healthy 11 year old girl. My story highlights how doctors’ predictions can be incorrect, and many children like mine can live to defy the odds, when given the chance. Back when I was pregnant with my daughter on my 20 week scan, they detected what they called a cystic abnormality of the lung. The doctor told me there wasn't much hope, that when my baby was to be born she could likely be stillborn or maybe just live a couple of hours due to the cist taking up a huge area of the lung not allowing her to breathe and therefore if she had a chance she would have to undergo several serious operations.
I was told that if she got through that she would always have difficulty breathing, would not be able to run or perform activities like any other normal child, and would ultimately have a very restricted lifestyle.

So eventually the consultant said if we wished, an abortion could be an option. We were completely devastated & heart broken, but also deeply disappointed and hurt that this was an option we could have been pressured into because of our baby having a disability. We loved our child regardless and agreed that we would never consider anything of the sort, we had to hold onto hope regardless of the odds.

Following on from this, my appointments were transferred to the royal hospital to have more specialised check-ups and care for my baby for before and after when she was to be born. She needed to have her own special care unit. As my pregnancy progressed, I had more scans & maybe around the 8th month the doctors, in total shock and surprise, said that the cyst in the lung had nearly disappeared completely – It was like a miracle. They couldn’t believe that this could be the same baby they had been following up and had given such a bleak diagnosis.

They told us that if it hadn’t have been for the 20 week scan to detect it, at this point we would never have known my baby had a problem at all. When the time came, I had my little girl perfectly healthy and beautiful – she had defied every expectation. How blessed and happy we were! She still had to undergo tests and every year or two, we take her for a check-up with the consultant in the children’s hospital as a tiny cyst remained but this has never bothered her in any way and could possibly be cleared away at this stage. Every time, we receive the same report from the consultant, of what a perfect, healthy child that she is. I hope my story will help the committee and if I can help in any other way I will be more than happy to.

Recommendations:

I would ask the committee to really listen to my story. I feel it is important to highlight that although we are living in a time of medical
advances, doctors are not fortune tellers and no diagnosis can ever be 100%. My little girl proves this. It breaks my heart to think that a correct of incorrect diagnosis could lead a family to choose abortion, out of blind fear and panic. We could easily have been overcome by fear of the future, or believed doctors because they have such medical authority, and went with abortion if they had have been insistent. Abortion would have been such a tragedy. We need to keep Northern Ireland’s laws pro-life to protect women like me and my children from abortion and to keep all babies safe, regardless of ability or disability.

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