Written submission from Stanton Healthcare Belfast (ANI0399)

Introduction
I am writing to you as the director of Stanton healthcare Belfast. We are a pregnancy resource centre specialising in care and practical support for women with unintended pregnancies. Our mission is to offer life-affirming solutions and resources to abortion – vulnerable women, and provide hope to those struggling from the pain of a past abortion.

Summary of main points:
- All of services are free.
- We ensure that women are totally informed and treated with the utmost respect dignity and compassion.
- Many women come to us who are abortion minded and after receiving the real support that they need, they change their mind
- Abortion is not the answer to an unintended pregnancy, real support is.
- Women in unintended pregnancies need real support; housing, baby supplies and a counselling befriender network that will walk with each mother through every appointment.
- We propose that the Women and equalities committee support us with our necessary work.
- We need to build a culture that empowers women in difficult pregnancies, changing the law will only create a culture in which more women will be forced into having an abortion as Abortion Care and Recovery helpline have already found. Typically 75% of women who are suffering after having an abortion, who contacted ARCH, were forced into it.
- We need to build a culture of support for women in unintended pregnancies, and this is what Stanton does.

At Stanton we provide both emotional and practical support to women in unintended pregnancies. The services that we provide are as follows; free pregnancy tests, options counselling, ultrasound referral, practical assistance, referrals and post-abortion care. All our services are free. We believe that every woman deserves to be informed. We believe that every woman is entitled to make the best choice. We believe that every woman deserves access to quality care and is entitled to a safe place. All our clients are treated with respect, dignity and compassion. They receive medial accurate information in a confidential and professional setting.

We believe, in Stanton healthcare that the women of Northern Ireland need real support when they are faced with an unintended pregnancy. Real support being housing, baby supplies, and a befriending counselling network that can walk with each mother. We propose to the Women and equalities committee, that they support us to give these young women the life affirming option of Stanton healthcare that aims to empower women so that she can make an informed decision.

On average, about ninety percent of the women that visit Stanton, are being forced into abortion by their partner. This is the highest and most unjust form of coercion - to be forced to end the life of your own child. Like you, I am concerned for the women of Northern Ireland that find themselves in these difficult unintended pregnancies, but
every time without fail, I see that these women do not want an abortion. Instead, they want, firstly a loving partner who is going to walk with them through the life changing process of welcoming another human being into the world. Secondly, they need support, emotional and practical. Thirdly, they need a society and a culture that empowers women with the knowledge that they are strong enough to say yes to life. That they are strong enough to carry, give birth to and raise their child, no matter the circumstances.

We have spoke one on one, with girls who are homeless, still in studies, unemployed or in an abusive relationship and every time, that girl weeps at the thought of having an abortion and pleads of a way out.

If abortion is legalised in Northern Ireland, we will see an unequivocal, unjustifiable amount of women forced into having an abortion. We will see many women facing abortion regret, in which we already witness in Stanton; a devastating state of despair. Abortion Care and Recovery helpline, a post abortion helpline based in the UK, have revealed that typically 75% of women who access the helpline were forced into having an abortion. We do not want to see this in Northern Ireland. Women deserve better than a culture and a law that states, in difficult unintended pregnancies, that your only option is to end the life of your child. We need to create a culture of life, a culture of empowerment and a culture of support. At Stanton this is our mission, and we are asking you as the Women and equalities committee to respect the will of the people, to respect our Pro - life laws and support the many mothers who need support in the life changing period of pregnancy, not abortion. Many of the girls have wrote into this committee with their story of how they were once abortion minded but changed their mind because they were offered real support.

We supported [name] when she found out that she was pregnant. She was [under 18], and her mother wrote to us and said, “When I found out that [name] was pregnant I felt sick, I was in shock and in a real panic. I phoned Stanton healthcare and they immediately calmed me down and assured me that we were not alone, and that helped me and I knew the support was there for me as long as we needed it. Because of their support and encouragement, my daughter continued with her education, and [before] her baby was born, [name] finished her last [exam]. When [name] was [under one], [name] received the news that she passed all her exams with flying colours. I am so proud of my daughter. I believe she will be a role model for other young teenagers who find themselves in crisis pregnancies. My message to other mothers who find themselves in similar situations is: don’t panic, get support from Stanton… and hang in there, things will change for the better. [Name] – ‘our gift’ – has made our lives so much more beautiful.”

I hope you find this submission informative regarding the important and necessary support that is offered to every woman in a difficult pregnancy, through Stanton healthcare Belfast.

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