1) DEVOLUTION

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond. Abortion is a complex matter, and there is a very wide spread of opinion on it. Some are very in favour of abortion in a variety of circumstances, and others feel that it should only be available in very particular circumstances. In some ways, people in Northern Ireland may have a somewhat different view on some complex matters, such as abortion. Given that abortion is a devolved matter, it seems imperative that a decision on this most important matter be made by elected representatives of Northern Ireland. Given that the Women and Equalities Committee is not elected directly by Northern Irish people, in some ways it would seem undemocratic for this Committee to seek to change the abortion law in Northern Ireland.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE

There are many people alive today in Northern Ireland because of the NI law on abortion. And yet, abortion is available in NI in some particular circumstances such as if a mother's life is at risk. I would suggest that the NI law on abortion is actually a good thing, rather than something that needs to be changed. For example, a disabled child in the womb is much less likely to be aborted in NI than in England, and this is surely a victory for human rights and equality. I would argue that this even applies in the very difficult cases of where a baby may live only for a few hours or days, with the thought that any life, even a brief one, is something worth striving to protect, rather than end.

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY

It is noted that the Supreme Court Justices findings in the area of abortion for life-limiting conditions and sexual crime were non-binding.

A key human right is the right to life. While it is acknowledged that there are some obvious differences between a life inside the womb and life outside the womb, it seems a stretch too far to allow for the baby's life to be ended, even in the case where it has a deformity. One example in English law is that abortion is permissible up to term for relatively minor abnormalities such as cleft lip/palate. Surely allowing for abortion in these circumstances does not accord with protecting rights, and promoting equality such as for the disabled. Our culture seeks to celebrate the achievement of disabled people through events such as the paralympics, and this does not seem to sit comfortably with removal of the legal protection for disabled babies in the womb.

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