Written submission from Rhonda McIlwrath (ANI0514)

1) DEVOLUTION
As a citizen of Northern Ireland, I believe that the elected representatives of N.I and our devolved government should be responsible for the law on abortion as they are best placed to reflect my views. It is unacceptable that a committee which has no N.I. members should interfere in such a sensitive issue. This is supported by a recent ComRes survey which showed that 66% of women and 70% of young people feel our devolved administration should deal with this issue.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
I am proud to live in a society that protects the rights and lives of unborn children. Lord Shinkwin recently stated that 'Northern Ireland is the safest place in the UK to be diagnosed with a disability before birth.' Sadly this is shown by 2016 statistics which indicate that 90% of children diagnosed with Down's Syndrome in England, Scotland and Wales were aborted while the statistics for NI were almost the opposite. Thousands of children are alive today in NI because of our abortion laws and I would want this protection to remain in place for every unborn child, regardless of disability or any other factor.

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
I firmly believe that any change to the current abortion law sets the rights of a woman against the rights of her child to life. I see little difference between the ending of a child's life in the womb or outside of it as both are alive. 98% of abortions are granted for social reasons and I feel that this discriminates against the most vulnerable and most helpless in society.

4) PERSONAL STORIES
As a teacher, I have seen the positive effects of our strict abortion laws. I have taught teenage girls who have become pregnant and go on to have their babies. It has been difficult for them but not one of them has any regrets. In fact, in some cases, it has given them the incentive to strive to achieve their aims to succeed in life. They would testify that they may have considered abortion as an easy escape from a difficult situation but could not have lived with the guilt of ending an innocent life.

December 2018