Written submission from Damien Murray (ANI0558)

1) DEVOLUTION
Nobody from the Women and Equalities Committee represents a local seat here in Northern Ireland and, as a devolved issue, this Committee - or anyone else - is in no position to decide upon this, or any other devolved issue, apart from our locally elected politicians.
This Committee does NOT speak for me ... nor the majority of people here in Northern Ireland, where a recent ComRes poll proved that between 64% and 70% of our local adult population believe that our abortion laws can only be decided upon by our own locally elected representatives. It has nothing to do with anyone else in Westminster and any movement on this by any Westminster politician would undermine the rights of our, and any other, devolved assemblies.
As our local Assembly is currently temporarily suspended, I believe that it would not only be totally wrong to interfere here, especially with such a sensitive issue, but it would also be constitutionally inappropriate to do so.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
Sadly, discrimination of one sort or another has been a major problem here in Northern Ireland and was a key issue when it comes to examining the many causes of our recent troubles and unrest. Although we all need to hang our heads in shame over this, we can take great pride in our current Abortion Law, which puts us above the rest of the UK in terms of any degree of discrimination against the disabled in the womb or those identified in utero to have Down’s Syndrome - indeed, having been described in the House of Lords as being 'the safest place in our United Kingdom to be diagnosed with a disability before birth,' we see this as something to be celebrated.
To put this in a more human context; as recently as 2016, around 90% of those identified in utero to have Down’s Syndrome in England, Scotland and Wales were aborted, while 90% of similarly identified children in Northern Ireland were born.
So, despite claims that our current laws don’t stop abortion, these laws not only make a huge difference but also go a long way in protecting the rights of our unborn.
The abortion law here has saved many lives, with recent research finding that an estimated 100,000 individuals are alive today in Northern Ireland who otherwise would not be had we followed England, Scotland and Wales in adopting the 1967 Abortion Act.
Complaints about this claim have been thoroughly investigated by the Advertising Standards Authority and others and the ASA concluded that the 100,00 figure was indeed reasonable.

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
While a number of Supreme Court Justices recently made non-binding indications that on two narrow points - life limiting conditions and sexual crime - the law on abortion here in Northern Ireland is incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the truth is that such cases only represent a small number of abortion cases, as less than 2% of recorded abortions in England and Wales were granted on these grounds.
Also, while a report issued by one unelected committee in the UN, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) suggests that our abortion laws here in Northern Ireland are not human rights compliant, it should be noted that this is NOT the view of the United Nations as a body.
Indeed, as a non-judicial body, this unelected committee has no legal standing to read such a right into the UN Convention and members of the United Kingdom Supreme Court have stated that the views of bodies such as the CEDAW Committee are only of marginal relevance.
Finally, there is also a danger 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 - if this were the case, it would be disastrous for future generations as it pitches a woman against her unborn child.

4) PERSONAL STORIES

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