Written submission from David Brownlow (ANI0571)

1) DEVOLUTION
I am contacting you to express my opposition to Westminster interfering in the affairs of Northern Ireland. I am particularly opposed to any attempt by Westminster to impose widespread access to abortion in Northern Ireland. Although the NI Assembly is currently suspended, I believe it would be constitutionally inappropriate for Westminster to interfere in such a sensitive matter. As this a devolved issue, it should be decided by Northern Ireland’s own elected representatives. A recent ComRes poll of adults in Northern Ireland indicated that 2 out of 3 believe that abortion should be decided by politicians in Northern Ireland, not Westminster.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
It is a fact that the current law on abortion in Northern Ireland has saved lives, approximately 100,000 since 1967 (according to research carried out in 2017 by 'Both Lives Matter'). The law on abortion in Northern Ireland also protects unborn babies with a disability from discrimination. For example, in 2016, 90% of unborn babies identified with Down's Syndrome in England, Scotland and Wales were aborted, compared with only 10% in Northern Ireland. This led Lord Shinkwin to conclude that, "Northern Ireland is the safest place in our United Kingdom to be diagnosed with a disability before birth." This is something that the majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see continue.

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
Those who campaign for widespread access to abortion often cite life-limiting conditions and sexual crime, but in reality such cases only account for a very small number of abortion cases (less than 2% in England and Wales). The argument for abortion is sometimes made on the basis of the misguided notion that the United Nations says that Northern Ireland’s abortion laws are not human rights compliant and that Northern Ireland should decriminalise abortion. In reality, this does not represent the the view of the United Nations as a body, but rather to a report issued by the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Prof Mark Hill QC has pointed out that CEDAW, as a non-judicial body, has no legal standing to read such a right into the UN Convention, and members of the UK Supreme Court have also highlighted that the views of bodies such as the CEDAW Committee are only of marginal relevance. The life, health and dignity of both mother and baby should always be valued, but if the law-makers acquiesce to the voices of those campaigning for widespread access to abortion, they will have accepted the lie that a women’s freedom is measured solely on her ability to end the life of her own child. I therefore implore the members of the Committee to carefully consider these factors as they consider this vitally important and sensitive subject, as thousands of lives may depend on the outcome of this consultation.

4) PERSONAL STORIES

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