Written submission from Sidlow McFarland (ANI0618)

1) DEVOLUTION
These matters require serious consideration. How can people who do not represent the people of N Ireland decide these important matters for us. It smacks of arrogance and paternalism.
Recent ComRes polling of NI adults shows that 64% of people think that abortion should be decided by Northern Ireland’s elected representatives, rising to 66% of women and 70% of 18 to 34 year olds.
Such a move by politicians at Westminster would set a worrying precedent for other devolved assemblies.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
The law on abortion in Northern Ireland has been proven to save lives. Research conducted by ‘Both Lives Matter’ in 2017 found that an estimated 100,000 individuals are alive today who otherwise would not be had Northern Ireland followed England, Scotland and Wales in adopting the 1967 Abortion Act. Complaints were made to the Advertising Standards Authority about this claim but after a 5 month investigation, involving health statisticians, the ASA concluded that the 100,000 figure was indeed reasonable.

In 2016, around 90% of those identified in utero to have Down’s Syndrome in England, Scotland and Wales were aborted. In Northern Ireland on the other hand, 90% of children identified in utero with Down’s Syndrome were born.
As Lord Shinkwin put it recently in the House of Lords, “Northern Ireland is the safest place in our United Kingdom to be diagnosed with a disability before birth

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
It might be believed that the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which defines the remit of the CEDAW Committee, sets out a right to abortion which Northern Ireland is failing to deliver. In truth, however, at no point does the Convention mention abortion.
As a non-judicial body, Prof Mark Hill QC has pointed out that CEDAW has no legal standing to read such a right into the Convention, much as some of its members may wish to do so.
Members of the United Kingdom Supreme Court have also highlighted that the views of bodies such as the CEDAW Committee are only of marginal relevance. As Lord Wilson put it, “the authority of their recommendations is slight.”
There is 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. This pitches a women against her unborn child and measures their freedom, equality and progress by their ability to end the life of their own child. This is a dangerous and destructive way to view women and humanity more widely. Many women, men and children see a better and more human way ahead which values the life, health and dignity of both as far as possible.

4) PERSONAL STORIES

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