Written submission from a member of the public (ANI0629)

1) DEVOLUTION
It seems inappropriate that a Westminster Committee should be interfering in a matter which is a devolved issue, especially when a recent ComRes poll has indicated that just under two-thirds of NI adults feel that issues around abortion should be decided by NI elected politicians. The figure was even higher (70%) for those aged 18-34. Would the people of Scotland or Wales welcome their wishes being overridden in a similar manner?
It also seems strange that the Women and Equalities Committee does not include any elected representative for a NI seat.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
While the law on abortion in Northern Ireland is often, in the media, portrayed as 'backward', it should rather be seen as indicative of a mature, inclusive society in which all life is valued. During 2016, 90% of children who were diagnosed in the womb with Down's Syndrome were in fact born. By contrast around the same percentage diagnosed during the same year in England, Scotland and Wales were aborted. When society is taking steps to be increasingly inclusive of those who have a disability, why should we facilitate discrimination against them prior to birth?
It should also be noted that the Advertising Standards Authority, having spent several months investigating the 'Both Lives Matter' claim, made in 2017, that 100,000 people are alive today because NI did not adopt the 1967 Abortion Act, found this claim to be reasonable. One hundred thousand lives to be celebrated; one hundred thousand people who had the opportunity to develop their potential and contribute to society!

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
It seems to me rather demeaning to women to infer that their ability to be truly free and equal is contingent upon their right to take the life of their unborn child. Such a measure of equality would be unthinkable after birth - why should it be acceptable before birth? The truly human response is to accord dignity to both lives, to nurture where possible the health of both mother and child. perhaps we need to remind ourselves that, excepting where sexual crime is involved, women have exercised their choice in the circumstances prior to conception.
CEDAW (Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) as I understand it does not have the legal standing required to read the right to abortion into the UN Convention on the EDAW. It is misleading to state that Northern Ireland's abortion laws are not human rights compliant when, in reality, this is not the view of the UN as a whole ; it is the view of the unelected CEDAW.

4) PERSONAL STORIES
My friend, in [year], during her first year at university, unwisely had unprotected sex which resulted in pregnancy. She was encouraged by some and given financial support to enable her to travel to England to have an abortion. While waiting to board the ferry she realised that she was not prepared to end the life of her unborn child and returned home. At that time there was still something of a social stigma attached to being an unmarried mother so it was an hard time for all the family; many years later my friend's mother referred to this as being the "most difficult time of her life, but", she continued, "our [relative] has brought us nothing but joy". My friend pursued a [career], specialising in [subject] - and is still [working] when her [professional] friends have thrown in the towel! Her [child] grew into a vibrant, intelligent young [person], who obtained two University degrees and has followed a [career path]. [They're] a delightful person whose contribution to society has been totally positive - what a loss had [they] been viewed as an inconvenience to her mother!

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