

May 8, 2013

Mr. Paul Kelly

Principal Clerk, Joint Committee on Health and Children

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We write on behalf of Global Doctors for Choice, an international network of physicians committed to improving reproductive health status around the world, to express our concern over the proposed bill, "The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill 2013." We fear that this bill contains provisions that will harm rather than promote women's health. This bill will not expand access to abortion in Ireland but merely clarify under which circumstances legal abortion may be provided. If this bill becomes law, abortion will remain illegal for women whose pregnancies involve serious health risks, are pregnant as a result of rape or incest, or are carrying a fetus with a serious abnormality. As physicians we support the clarifications provided by this bill, but are alarmed as several provisions will impose unnecessary regulations on the provision of abortion care that will hamper Irish women's access to legal abortion services. For example, in the case of the risk of suicide, the law will require certification by three different doctors. This could delay urgently needed care for no justified reason.

There is consensus among medical, public health and human rights groups that safe abortion is essential to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality and to guarantee women's human rights. The language used in the draft of this bill creates obstacles that would limit women's access to abortion services, even in situations that pose serious threats to women's health. We urge Ireland to conform to evidence-based medical standards of care and to the human rights framework which includes the right to health, and not to endanger the lives and wellbeing of its female citizens.

The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar occurred after the denial of appropriate medical care for an inevitable spontaneous abortion. This case demonstrates that the abortion restrictions in Ireland adversely affect the quality of medical care and can result in unnecessary and preventable morbidity and mortality. Denial of needed abortion services violates standards of obstetrical care that are well established and evidence-based. We call on your government to take urgent and decisive steps to reform this legislation which led to Savita's death. Until the Irish law is reformed, the lives, health and autonomy of women across Ireland are in jeopardy. This proposed bill will neither promote women's health and rights nor conform to medical best practices. Please take the necessary steps to protect the integrity of the practice of medicine and promote appropriate standards of medical care so that future tragedies are prevented.

Sincerely,

Global Doctors for Choice