



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion
(Amendment) Bill: Committee Report

11 November 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradshaw
Mrs Deborah Erskine
Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Members, we will now formally consider the final draft of the Committee report on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill, and agreement will be sought on each of the sections. A draft of the final report is at tab 14.1 of your pack. Have members any comment to make on the draft report?

Mrs Cameron: My party and I are a bit disappointed in the report and the way in which it has been going. Obviously, the Bill is concise, and we are limited in where we can go with that. I do not think that the inclusion of some of the issues, such as calling for the full commissioning of abortion services, is appropriate. I understand that we took a vote on that last week. Certainly, my party lost that vote. I put on record that the Bill is very specific, and we are veering towards other issues that are only loosely connected to it. I put on record my objection to that. It should not be included in the report.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): OK. Your point has been noted and is on record. You are right that we voted on the issue last week and agreed. However, your point is on record. Thank you.

Can we move to the final agreement of the sections of the report?

Ms Bradshaw: Sorry, Chair. I thought that you were moving off the subject. I can come back to it afterwards.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): First, I refer members to the title page, table of contents and Committee powers and membership. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the executive summary. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the introduction and Committee approach, which is at paragraphs 1 to 22. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the consideration of the evidence received on the Bill, which is at paragraphs 23 to 126. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, which is at paragraphs 127 to 133. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the appendices. Are members content with that section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Are members content that the minutes of the meeting be approved by the Chair so that they can be included as part of this report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Are members content for Committee staff to make any necessary formatting changes in advance of electronic publication?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Is the Committee for Health content for the report on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill to be published?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Yes, Pam.

Mrs Cameron: Can the wording of my party's objection be included in the report? I reiterate my party's opposition to including a call for the full implementation of commissioned abortion services in the text of the report. I want to put that on record, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Clerk, will that be reflected in the minutes of the meeting?

The Committee Clerk: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): The objection will be on record. Thank you, members.

I also seek agreement to issue a link to the report to the organisations that provided evidence to the Committee and the Bill sponsor. The Bill sponsor and the organisations will have a link provided directly to them. Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you, members.

Ms Bradshaw: I will not take long. It has been a long meeting.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Paula, are you raising any other business?

Ms Bradshaw: No. It is in connection with the recommendations in the report. A few meetings ago, I asked the Clerk to look into the legal position of the current court ruling and the bearing of the judge's

ruling on the Secretary of State's role. Can we get an update on that? As the Committee agreed to include the reference to the Minister commissioning abortion services, can we ask for an oral, not written, briefing on progress from the Department?

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I will check with the Clerk about the legal situation. Clerk, do you have an update? Can you advise the Committee?

The Committee Clerk: Unfortunately, Paula, I do not have an update on that yet. I will chase that up after this meeting.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you. Are members content to schedule an oral briefing on the commissioning of those services?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you, members.