

SHORT BRIEFING NOTE

DIANA JOHNSON'S TEN MINUTE RULE MOTION ON ABORTION

23 OCTOBER 2018

- On Tuesday 23rd October, Diana Johnson MP will bring forward a Ten Minute Rule Motion regarding a proposed change to abortion law to Parliament. She has indicated that she will be seeking a vote on the motion.
- The Johnson Bill would remove many of the current legal safeguards around abortion and introduce one of the most extreme abortion regimes in the world right across England, Wales and Northern Ireland:
 - Abortion campaigners have indicated that they are seeking to remove sections of the Offences Against the Persons Act, Infant Life (Preservation) Act, Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) and the Abortion Act.
- **This radical change to legislation should be opposed for the following reasons:**
 - It would undermine the devolution settlement by amending abortion law to impose abortion on Northern Ireland against the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland¹.
 - This is bad for devolution everywhere and contrary to Government policy².
 - This radical change also requires the imposition of significant additional regulation and infrastructure that currently does not exist in Northern Ireland.
 - Polling from ComRes released on Wednesday 17 October shows that 64% of the general population and 66% of women in Northern Ireland agree that changing the law on this issue should be a decision for the people of Northern Ireland and their elected representatives³.
 - In England and Wales, the Abortion Act, along with along with the legal safeguards it provides, would no longer apply to abortions through to 24-weeks, i.e six months, gestation.
 - Abortions could be obtained for any reason whatsoever, including gender-selective abortion.
 - Abortions would no longer require the supervision of registered medical practitioners.
 - There would no longer be a legal requirement that two doctors certify an abortion.
 - Self-abortion ('DIY-abortion') right up-to-birth would be legalised. Any means would be legal.
 - The legal protections contained in the Offences Against the Persons Act protecting against online suppliers of abortion pills or equipment to undertake a 'DIY' or 'backstreet' abortion would be removed.
- **The proposal is out of touch with the views of British women and most European abortion laws:**
 - Recent polling⁴ from ComRes shows that a majority of British women want more not fewer safeguards across a number of key areas. This includes:
 - 91% of women agree that gender-selective abortion should be explicitly banned by the law.
 - 70% of women believe that the current 24-week gestational limit for abortion should be reduced;
 - 93% of women agree that a woman considering abortion should have a legal right to independent counselling from a source that has no financial interest in her decision.
 - 84% of women agree women who want to continue with their pregnancies, but are under financial pressure to have an abortion, should be given more support.
- **The wholesale removal of legal safeguards would likely allow for far greater abuses than have already occurred under the current law:**
 - Already within our current legal framework we have seen doctors pre-signing abortion forms⁵, gender-selective abortions being offered⁶, live babies being left to die following abortions that have gone wrong⁷, and children with minor disabilities, such as cleft palate⁸, being aborted.
- The British public prides itself on being a reasonable, humane and tolerant society. Such an extreme and radical proposal has no place in the UK. **Please vote against Diana Johnson's Ten Minute Rule Motion on Tuesday 23rd October 2018.**

¹ In 2016, a clear majority of the Northern Ireland Assembly, including both Unionists and Nationalists, upheld the law on abortion as it currently stands.

² <http://bit.ly/2J29t66>

³ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/most-people-in-northern-ireland-want-abortion-law-decision-made-locally-survey-37431821.html>

⁴ <http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Where-Do-They-Stand-Abortion-Survey-Data-Tables.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10807990/Pre-signing-abortion-forms-is-illegal-General-Medical-Council-admits.html>

⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/9099511/Abortion-investigation-doctors-filmed-agreeing-illegal-abortions-no-questions-asked.html>

⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-512129/66-babies-year-left-die-NHS-abortions-wrong.html>

⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3761905/Fury-number-abortions-cleft-lip-babies-rises-new-womb-tests-offered.html>