



Diocese of Armidale

Ph: (02) 6772 4971
Fax: (02) 5701 5140
Email: chancery@armidale.catholic.org.au

Catholic Chancery Office
3/131 Barney Street
PO Box 93
Armidale NSW 2350

1st June, 2018

Our ref: 8.1

Mr Kevin Anderson MP
13 Fitzroy Street
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

Email: tamworth@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Kevin,

RE: PUBLIC HEALTH AMENDMENT (SAFE ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CLINICS) BILL 2018

I hope my letter finds you well and enjoying your life of public service. I would like to express my concern in relation to the Public Health Amendment (Safe Access to Reproductive Health Clinics) Bill 2018 which would create "safe zones" around abortion clinics up to 150 metres.

This Bill would prevent street councillors from reaching out to mothers considering abortion. I am familiar with numerous instances where such contact has resulted in mothers choosing to keep their baby for which they have been extremely grateful. Tragically, it seems mothers in situations of unintended pregnancy or difficult circumstances are funnelled by the system towards abortion without full knowledge of the procedure and its consequences and without awareness of assistance that might be available to them. This bill would only exacerbate this situation. It prevents vulnerable women from receiving practical support from pro-life groups and individuals.

The bill would stop people from demonstrating and prohibit pro-life groups and even individuals from praying within 150 metres of an abortion clinic – even when they do not attempt to talk to people entering the clinic. The Bill is therefore a direct threat to freedom of religion and freedom of speech. Additionally, it creates a precedent for future restrictions on other peaceful protests or gatherings.

The activities of pro-life groups and individuals in Australia are overwhelmingly peaceful. And if ever they are not the existing laws and the powers of the police mean that anyone harassing other people entering venues can be stopped. The Bill is therefore not necessary.

It is interesting that the bill relates only to abortion clinics and the rights of those who enter them. Is the Parliament prepared to create 150 metre safe access zones around churches and places of worship where unfortunately worshippers are sometimes verbally abused and physically obstructed by pro-abortion groups and other special interest groups? I ask, if the Parliament does not propose to make such a law for churches, or for other businesses why not? Are only abortion clinics sacred in New South Wales?

I hope I can have the opportunity to speak with you personally about my concerns and the concerns of the many parish church communities whom I serve.

With gratitude for all you do for the community and praying that God will bless you for your dedicated service, I am

Yours sincerely,

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale