

6<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about abortion and the Domestic Abuse Bill.

I completely understand what an incredibly emotive issue this is, and I appreciate the strength of feelings on both sides. It is for this reason that, as with other matters of conscience, the Government adopts a neutral stance on abortion, allowing Conservative MPs to vote freely according to their moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. This is a convention which I support wholeheartedly.

The approach to abortion in Great Britain is set out in the Abortion Act 1967, which states that two doctors must certify that, in their opinion, a request for an abortion meets at least one and the same ground laid out in the Act. These grounds include “*risk to the life of the pregnant woman*”, and “*substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped*”.

I am encouraged that guidance for doctors on how to comply with the Act has been issued, which stipulates that registered medical practitioners should be able to show how they have considered the particular facts and circumstances of a case when forming their opinion. Full details can be found online at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-doctors-on-compliance-with-the-abortion-act](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-doctors-on-compliance-with-the-abortion-act).

I know that a number of colleagues proposed an amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill which sought to decriminalise abortion so that women who end their own pregnancies, including women who access abortion medication online, are not held criminally responsible. I note the intent of the amendment to protect vulnerable women from prosecution, however I am concerned that doing so would overturn the safeguarding measures brought in by the 1967 Abortion Act, and I would prefer to discuss this as part of primary legislation.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**Alok Sharma MP**

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