

Alok Sharma, MP for Reading West

19th October 2018

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about Diana Johnson MP's Ten Minute Rule Bill.

Abortion is a highly sensitive issue, regardless of where your view lies and one where it is important that the matter is considered with due care and respect.

I would also like to make clear that the Government's policy is to allow a free vote on matters of conscience such as abortion.

I do, however, have concerns about the points raised in the Diana Johnson's Ten Minute Rule Bill. I do not support the repealing of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861 for several reasons. Primarily, repealing those two sections does not solve the issue of abortion in Northern Ireland, as without any new provisions it offers no safeguards for women, and would impact on England and Wales, as well as Northern Ireland.

The 1967 Abortion Act provides defences against the criminal law offences contained in the 1861 Act. If these offences were removed then abortion would in effect be decriminalised and no legal framework would be in place, including no gestational time limits. A new legal framework would be needed to replace those provisions, which is rightly a devolved matter which locally accountable politicians in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to debate and consider.

The measures in the Bill also go a lot further than current debate in Northern Ireland, so it is important legislation is not imposed on Northern Ireland and we allow local politicians the opportunity to represent the views of the people of Northern Ireland. This is why this Government's priority is to restore devolved government at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP