

Office of the Legislative Counsel  
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March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To the Members of the Standing Committee on Law Amendments and the Nova Scotia Legislature:

I would like to send in my remarks in support of Bill 242, Protecting Access to Reproductive Health Care Act.

I moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia to pursue a master's degree in the fall of 2010. I've been a very proud resident of this wonderful city ever since (and the province for most of my life). However, when I arrived in the "big city", living as a student in the South End of Halifax, I noticed something awfully surprising – there were folks camped outside the Victoria General hospital most days. I walked by them most days, too. What I later learned was these individuals took it upon themselves to shame and insult those who would be going in to the Women's Choice Clinic. I was appalled. And this was just one example in our province.

As a very young person, I was able to contemplate the empathy I had for women and others who would have to arrive to what is often an already difficult day, increased by this scrutiny and hardship. Imagine a world where folks would camp out of a medical ward because they didn't believe in blood transfusions (very possible given some religions' beliefs, however not accepted at the hospital at all). However, for literally decades, we've allowed this sort of harassment to occur.

What surprises me now, is that in 2020, it remains the same.

Beyond the appeal to empathy, understanding, and considerate care, there are many reasons why this bill must pass:

- Access to reproductive health care is a right in our country and has been for decades. The deterrent of having harassers on site is not acceptable and does not give free access to our healthcare system.
- Because of this, it creates a system that makes it harder for women and others who bear children to access healthcare, being inherently discriminatory in nature.
- This is not protest, it is harassment. In all likelihood, these "protests" do not result in changed behaviour that they are seeking, but merely makes the access to healthcare unduly difficult.
- This harassment can create further trauma and health issues for those who endure the effects.

I am sure that there may be those against abortion during the sitting on March 6<sup>th</sup>. I am sure that those individuals would try to sway something that is foregone – that reproductive rights in our country are just that – a right, and that includes abortion. Their "protest", when directed to those accessing healthcare in our province, is not a protest, it is harassment.

While my remarks do not speak for the Local Council of Women, Halifax, on their own, our Executive has agreed to support this Bill unanimously and I would like that to be known by the members.

Many thanks for your reading and consideration.

Sincerely,



Sarah B. MacDonald, MA, CFRE

President, Local Council of Women, Halifax