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Response to Abortion on the Grounds of Disability - Lord Shinkwin's PMB - We're All Equal Campaign – February 2017

Thank you for contacting me about Lord Shinkwin's Private Members' Bill.

I appreciate that abortion remains a highly sensitive area of public policy and on which there are a range of strongly held views.

In 1990, on a free vote, Parliament voted to amend the Abortion Act 1967 to permit termination of pregnancy where two medical practitioners form the same opinion in good faith that "there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped." These are known as ground E abortions and can be performed at any gestation in the pregnancy.

Not every pregnancy goes to plan and fetal abnormalities of varying degree of severity occur. Women need support and information to reach an informed decision about how to proceed. I recognise that these decisions are extremely difficult and painful for parents. Health professionals must adopt a supportive and non-judgemental approach regardless of whether the decision is to terminate or continue the pregnancy.

Lord Shinkwin's Bill would have the effect that abortions for fetal abnormality could no longer be performed for this reason specifically. Women with a pregnancy where a fetal abnormality is diagnosed could however still seek a termination for another reason within the law. However, this would not be the case for women over 24 weeks pregnant unless the termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the health of the pregnant women.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP