

Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

16th January 2018

Dear TD,

We are writing to you with regard to the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, due to be debated in the Dáil this week.

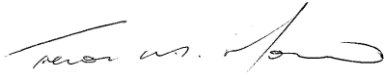
Firstly, we want to acknowledge the deep human pain and tragedies with which we are concerned when addressing this issue. Many women and their families will find the ongoing discussions very difficult due to the loss of a child or for other reasons, and it is important that all of us in public leadership, while seeking a robust and informed debate, are mindful of these realities.

We believe that the vast majority of citizens in Ireland regard every human life as having dignity, value and worth, and this includes both the mother and the unborn child. In affirming life, wellbeing and human dignity, it is important that we work together to ensure that the best possible care is provided to women, their children and families in times of crisis, including practical, emotional and spiritual support. We welcome the reference in the Committee's report to perinatal hospice care – something which our Church has been calling for, to provide support to parents in cases of life-limiting illness while respecting the life of the unborn child.

The scientific evidence and logical conclusion that new human life exists from conception clearly implies that every society genuinely committed to fundamental human rights, especially the right to life, should take the moral and physical status of the unborn very seriously indeed. Our Church holds a strongly pro-life position, while recognising that there can be very exceptional circumstances when the termination of pregnancy may be necessary. However, we are very gravely concerned about the Committee's recommendations to introduce abortion with no restriction as to reason until the 12th week of gestation, and beyond 12 weeks on health grounds. Even if the recommendation of abortion on request is excluded, the health proposals on their own will create similar provisions to those in Britain, which have, in practice, brought about abortion on request (we note that one in five pregnancies ends in abortion in GB and that of the 190,406 abortions in England and Wales in 2016, 97% took place on health grounds). These recommendations also effectively undermine any assurances that Ireland will not introduce abortion for disability, as the experience of other countries demonstrates that unborn children with Down's syndrome or other conditions are aborted under health grounds.

It is clear that Irish society has come to value unborn human life in a way that it is not valued in other societies, demonstrating how the law plays an important role in shaping culture. In recent decades, practices of abortion have been introduced and legalised in the West which represent a tragic reversal of the process by which we have learned to value and protect those who Jesus described as the 'least' among us. We strongly urge you to work for an Ireland that follows a different, more truly progressive path, and is a place where the weak and vulnerable, including children in the womb, are cherished and protected.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Trevor W J Morrow".

Very Rev Dr Trevor W J Morrow

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Norman Hamilton".

Very Rev Dr T Norman Hamilton

On behalf of the Council for Public Affairs