



AUSTRALIAN
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Media release

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IT'S TIME TO DECRIMINALISE ABORTION IN NSW AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) has expressed its strong support for decriminalisation of abortion in NSW. Co-Chair of ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights Subcommittee, Rita Shackel, said the failure to provide safe, legal and accessible abortion services is a violation of fundamental human rights and that exclusion zones surrounding abortion clinics need to be immediately introduced.

The Abortion Law Reform (Miscellaneous Acts Amendment) Bill 2016 introduced by Greens MLC Dr. Mehreen Faruqi is due to be debated in the NSW Legislative Council this Thursday.

Abortion is currently a criminal offence under the NSW Crimes Act, punishable by 10 years imprisonment. While abortion providers operate in New South Wales, they exist within an ambiguous legal space and, as a result, access to services is limited and there remains uncertainty in the medical profession and community.

The Bill would decriminalise abortion and enact safe access zone to prevent harassment and intimidation of women accessing health clinics, similar to laws in Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. It would also require health practitioners to refer women to another doctor or health service if they hold a conscientious objection to abortion.

"Those who seek abortions should not be treated as criminals and the majority of Australians recognise that our laws need to change to reflect this. Data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found that 81 per cent of Australians believe a woman should have the right to choose to have an abortion," Shackel said.

Anna Kerr Co-Chair of ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights Subcommittee said, "The current NSW laws are archaic and not reflective of community values or of internationally recognised human rights principles. According to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Australia has an obligation to protect the rights of women and girls to access health services, including family planning and to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights," Kerr said.

"Decriminalisation of abortion has already occurred in Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania and most recently the Northern Territory. However, in the context of President Trump's anti-abortion 'global gag rule' and the recent reintroduction of Zoe's Law by Fred Nile in NSW there is no place for complacency in relation to reproductive rights. ALHR calls on the NSW Government to act in accordance with Australia's international human rights obligations and support the passing of this legislation to provide safe and legal access to abortion services.

To arrange an interview with Anna Kerr, please contact Matt Mitchell on 0431 980 365.