



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
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Bills - Second Reading Debate

7 June 2018

**PUBLIC HEALTH AMENDMENT (SAFE ACCESS TO
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CLINICS) BILL 2018 (SHARPE)**

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (20:00) :

I place on record my support for the Public Health Amendment (Safe Access to Reproductive Health Clinics) Bill 2018. I also place on record that our experiences in life before we come to this Parliament are important and shape the way that we behave. I will look the members of the Government—or those people who have a different view to me—in the eye and say this with a strong heart: I am proud of the fact that my upbringing has created many experiences for me. My mother was 14½, pregnant and grew up in orphanages, like her brothers and sisters, and she had to make some difficult choices without having the chance to consider her decisions.

In the Housing Commission family I come from I have seen many things. I taught in the bush and I saw people who were wealthy cockies, and I saw poor people. One of my best friends lived on a mission in Walgett, and she remains my great friend still. I think I have seen it all. I have seen many things and I bring those experiences with me as I walk into Parliament, as I did when I first entered Parliament in 2007. That has shaped the way that I behave and what I say to the House now. I can say this to all members with a strong heart, and it is something that I am proud of. I do not have to hold my head down. I can look at the Government members and say quite strongly what I feel. I support this bill.

In 2011 the wife of one of my staff members suffered a miscarriage. She was required to have a medical abortion. This involved her attending a local clinic and, despite having suffered a lot of trauma and heartache about the pregnancy, she and her husband were forced to endure insults and had big posters and brochures shoved in their faces. They were called names. They were subjected to protesters quoting Bible passages at them and they were jostled the whole way—which is surprising because my staff member is a big bloke. That was a traumatic

experience for both of them. I am sure no member of this House would want their staff member or someone they know, their partner, their wife, their sister, their daughter or their granddaughter subjected to the intimidation and insults that they were subjected to. Yet women across New South Wales who attempt to access health clinics that provide reproductive health services, including abortion, cancer screening and contraception, are subjected to harassment and intimidation by individuals and organised groups.

The self-described sidewalk counsellors wait outside these clinics and distress staff and clients.

They hand out material bearing graphic, inaccurate and offensive images. If they are anything like the images I and my colleagues were subjected to when we were walking into Parliament from Macquarie Street recently, they are very confronting and made me feel very uncomfortable. They take photos, as a woman did outside Parliament this morning, and videos without permission as a means to further frighten clients—and they do frighten clients. They physically block entry to clinics, calling women "child murderers" and threatening women with ill-founded medical consequences if they enter a clinic.

Recently, this has been particularly problematic at the Surry Hills and Albury clinics. It is and has been for a long time a problem locally at Broadmeadow. Unfortunately, it occurs on a daily basis at clinics in the Hunter. All women deserve the right to enter any health facility free from harassment and with their privacy protected. Currently in New South Wales, women do not have that right and they do not have their privacy protected. That worries me greatly. Currently four jurisdictions—Victoria, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory—have successfully introduced 150-metre safe access zones around reproductive health clinics. We must do the same here in New South Wales. This bill seeks to introduce such a measure.

The purpose of a safe access zone is to prohibit certain behaviour within a radius of 150 metres of a reproductive health clinic where abortions are provided. The bill provides that a person who is in a safe access zone cannot harass, intimidate, interfere with, threaten, hinder, obstruct or impede, by any means, any person accessing, leaving, or attempting to access or leave any reproductive health clinic at which abortions are provided. The bill seeks to stop people obstructing a footpath or road leading to reproductive health clinics or from making a communication that is reasonably likely to cause anguish or anxiety to those accessing, leaving or attempting to access or leave a clinic.

While it is too late for those who have been subjected to the insults and taunts that I have mentioned—and I know that they have locally in Broadmeadow—the passing of the bill will mean that women will be able to go to the doctor and not have to explain themselves to strangers who harass them on the street. Some calls and emails to my office over the past few weeks have talked about the right to freedom of speech. Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are rights that all modern democracies support and uphold, and we do so in this Parliament. This bill does not interfere with that right.

The behaviour and actions of these sidewalk counsellors outside reproductive health clinics are not protests or types of speech that are acceptable in any other circumstance. They are simply intimidation and harassment of individual women who are accessing a medical service. No person seeking lawful medical service advice or legal treatment and care should be forced to encounter abuse, threats or intimidation. Everyone has the right to a level of freedom of speech but also everyone has the right to be protected from intimidation and harassment and to keep their dignity and privacy. I commend this wonderful bill to the House.