



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**Bills - Second Reading Debate**

---

6 August 2019

**Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019**

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) ( 20:45 ):**

Abortion is still a crime in New South Wales. That is a statement which prompts disbelief in many. History has demonstrated a lack of respect for women, including the right to vote, work or attend university. Decisions about women's future were entirely in their parents' or their husband's hands. Debates about their hard-earned empowerment—allowing women to have a choice in their lives and health care—are negated by sections 82 to 84 of the Crimes Act 1900. This results in women and their doctors being in either legal limbo or having potentially dangerous medical procedures outside the medical system. How can doctors, who fear prosecution for accessing or providing abortions, adequately care for their patients? I respect the strong views on either side of the House, which are sincerely and deeply held. Therefore, I urge members to debate the bill with sincerity and dignity.

Approximately one in four women will terminate a pregnancy at some stage in their life. Some 95 per cent of these terminations occur within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy and very few take place after 20 weeks, with a team of health care professionals. It is estimated that 36,000 abortions occurred in New South Wales last year. Due to this estimation, criminalisation means that reliable, timely and detailed data on abortion is impossible to collect. It is therefore difficult to develop policy. Now is the time to end the legal limbo. Of particular concern are women in regional and rural areas, those in abusive family settings or those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are disproportionately impacted by criminalisation. Why? Due to the expense, the tyranny of distance and the lack of availability, abortion is impossible for many.

When a woman terminates a pregnancy many people want to know why. Is it for financial or medical reasons, or because of family and relationships? It is nobody's business. This bill is an opportunity for us to speak candidly about terminations. A decision to terminate a pregnancy is not taken lightly or without great angst. As United States Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackman wrote in the landmark *Roe v Wade* case:

The right of personal privacy includes the abortion decision.

How would you feel if you had a medical situation and you dreaded talking about it with your GP for fear of legal ramifications? That is how we must treat abortion; medically, not legally. On that medical basis I note the support for decriminalisation from the Law Society of New South Wales and the New South Wales Bar Association. I note support from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists as well as the Australian Medical Association and Family Planning NSW. My own observations as a former teacher in remote New South Wales, in communities such as Walgett and Kempsey where I lived for a long time, were that women's lives were endangered by a lack of access to reproductive health care. A local constituent named Rachel said:

*All women across New South Wales should be able to access reproductive health care not just those who live in major cities or can travel there. This is health care and health care should be equitable and accessible.*

Another constituent's email reinforced this belief. She said:

*I believe that a woman knows what makes sense for her health, her body and her future; and decriminalising abortion is an issue of health care, and of dignity. It's long past time New South Wales had a compassionate healthcare system that recognised the deeply personal and complex reasons that a person may need to end a pregnancy.*

They are very thought provoking comments. Abortion remains a crime in New South Wales. Today we have an opportunity to update the 119-year-old law. It is time to decriminalise a medical condition that is privy between a patient and her practitioner, not the law courts. This bill will take abortion out of the realm of the criminal and into the medical, where it belongs. I have been thinking about whether I would reveal a conversation that I had with someone last night. I will share a little of it with this House. Before I share that information I want you to consider the experiences of this person before you make any judgements. The person I am referring to is named Roma Irene Richardson of good Irish Catholic stock. Together with her sister and brother she was placed in an orphanage at a young age and remained there throughout their childhood. The brother was separated from the girls and placed in Murray Dwyer orphanage. The girls were placed in Monte Pio orphanage.

This woman became pregnant with her first child at 14 years old. She had her second child at 16. Her husband was a heavy drinker, a heavy smoker and the family had no support. This woman became pregnant again at 16 with her third child. She decided she could not cope and she paid£10 to go to a backyard abortion clinic in Hamilton, Newcastle. That woman, Roma Irene Richardson, is my mother. I understand the reasons why that happened to my mother and she wanted to portray this message to all of you tonight so you can understand why that happened to her. She is okay; but she had to have an abortion in a backyard. She wanted to convey the opinion that she believes this is a woman's choice. In conclusion, I thank the working party for caring for New South Wales women. To my community, thank you for the respect and empathy you demonstrated to everyone in your discussions and your support for women across New South Wales. I thank my mother Roma Irene Hornery. She is a wonderful woman who had a really tough upbringing but we have all done really well. I commend the bill to the House.