



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES
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Rt Hon Mr Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London, SW1A 2NS

Dear Secretary of State,

I was very concerned when I read about the Department of Health consultation, "Procedures for the Approval of Independent Sector Places for the Termination of Pregnancy". A formal response to the consultation from the Catholic Church will be being made by our Anscombe Centre for Bioethics of which I am a trustee.

My purpose in writing to you personally is to underline the personal and social tragedy hidden within the law and the way it is currently applied, and to invite you lead a much wider and broader consultation which would enable these very sensitive and difficult issues to be more honestly and openly debated.

Abortion is deeply contentious, and of course the Catholic Church's principled opposition to procured abortion it is clear and well known. But I believe there are very many people in our society who, whilst not necessarily agreeing with the Church's teaching, are nonetheless deeply troubled by the current situation where we have 200,000 abortions a year. This is a hidden human and social tragedy on a huge scale.

No-one reading the 1967 Act and the debates which led up to it could imagine that this is what even the advocates of legal abortion were seeking. Those who framed the Act believed that abortion was an action of such moral weight that it could only be permitted if 2 doctors, acting in good faith, believed the request complied with the requirements of the Act and that it had to be performed by a registered medical practitioner in an approved place. Over time we have seen the gradual erosion of the moral significance of this profound decision, and the re-framing of it as a simple medical procedure. These proposals, consulted on and debated in isolation, lead further down the road towards treating the abortion of a young human life as a routine medical procedure. It completely masks the underlying social and moral questions. The acute difficulty our society has in addressing those is revealed all too clearly by the recent debate over sex selection in abortion.

The Church seeks to work with all men and women of good will to find means to reduce the need for abortion, such as the provision of counselling for women who become unexpectedly pregnant and adequate social and financial support for families and for single parents. There is a widespread acknowledgement that the scale of abortion in the England and Wales can only be a source of distress and profound anguish for us all.

Creating the space for an open and honest debate about that, through your department initiating wider consultation or commission on abortion law, would, I suggest, be a timely and principled response to the current situation.

With every best wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Smith', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

The Most Revd. Archbishop Peter Smith, LL.B., J.C.D.
Chair, Department of Christian Responsibility and Citizenship
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales