



Government Equalities Office

Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Minister for Women & Equalities

Government Equalities Office
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
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29 June 2017

Dear Colleagues

I am writing to you regarding Amendment (d) selected as part of the Queen's Speech debate concerning abortions performed in England for women from Northern Ireland.

As Minister for Women and Equalities, I share the concerns of many colleagues about the experience of women from Northern Ireland obtaining an abortion through the NHS in England.

As you will know, abortion in Great Britain is governed by the Abortion Act 1967 – originally a Private Member's Bill. Abortion law has always been in this House a matter of conscience for individual Members.

Residents of Northern Ireland are currently able to access abortion services in England but, in general, must make their own private arrangements for so doing, because health policy is a devolved matter. The longstanding position in Northern Ireland has been that abortion is only funded and permissible in very limited circumstances.

At present women from Northern Ireland are asked for payment, and from now on it is our proposal that this will no longer happen. This is clearly a sensitive issue and one which has direct implications for equality in treatment of women from Northern Ireland. Following discussions with the Department of Health, we will ensure these payments will be funded through the Government Equalities Office with additional funding. This will mean no English health service user is disadvantaged as a result of this change.

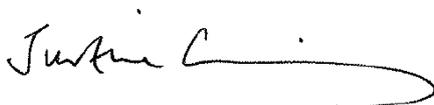
Funding for the services will be made available through the Government Equalities Office, allowing the Department of Health to commission abortion



services in England for those from Northern Ireland.

The Supreme Court judgment made clear that we have the power to make these arrangements. The Government's position continues to be that we want to see safe abortion services provided for women who may need them – within the bounds of the law.

None of this changes the fundamental position that this is a devolved issue in Northern Ireland. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide on their policy going forward. This announcement does not change that position.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justine Greening', with a long, sweeping underline.

Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Minister for Women and Equalities