

Legislative Council

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CONSENT TO MEDICAL TREATMENT AND PALLIATIVE CARE (TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY) AMENDMENT BILL

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (21:05):

I rise to speak to the Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care (Termination of Pregnancy) Amendment Bill introduced to this place by the Hon. Dennis Hood. This is a simple and straightforward bill that requires women attending pregnancy advisory clinics and receiving information on abortion also to be provided with information on adoption as another option.

This bill has been turned around basically to be portrayed in this place as something that it is not. This is not about whether or not women will ever have to forgo their choice to have an abortion. This is about providing women with information of an option that should exist. I have a whole thing prepared here, but I might do one of my raves—

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Not a long one. I do not buy the argument that the Hon. Ian Hunter tried to represent in his speech that this is the beginning of a slippery slope. If we are going to talk about slippery slopes and abortion we are already there. The legislation for abortion was introduced for women who had life-threatening conditions or illnesses, or for whatever medical reason it would be life threatening for them to see through the pregnancy.

I attended a function the other night where I heard that 98 per cent of abortions are now occurring because women can claim that it would be psychologically harmful for them to go through with the pregnancy. I do not deny that there are women out there who can go to a clinic and seek out information on abortion, have an abortion and walk out of that clinic and never give it another day's thought, or so they think.

I also believe that there are women and young girls who, when they find out they are pregnant, are in a distressed state and who are referred to these so-called pregnancy advisory clinics. Let me tell you that they are almost forced to consider no other option. There is one group of people who can cope with that, cope with an abortion, and recover and move on with their lives—free-for-all. There is another group of women over here who cannot.

There are young women at school (and I have heard this from a school counsellor) who, as soon as the school finds out they are pregnant, are referred to one of these clinics to make arrangements to have an abortion. This is the school intervening in that process. The family is cut out of this, and that young girl, that young teenager, is then forced to deceive her family and do something that may be against her very grain, and that leaves that girl scarred for the rest of her life.

There are certain things that we need to consider with this—that it is not just about a one-size-fits-all situation for women who are having abortions. If we do not consider both sides of this then we are doing one side a terrible disservice. No-one is saying that women who go into an abortion clinic or a pregnancy advisory clinic seeking information on abortion is going to be talked out of an abortion. What we do know is that many are talked into an abortion, and we have to level that out a little bit, I think. It is our responsibility to level that out a little bit.

The Hon. Ian Hunter also used the example of women who have been raped and have fallen pregnant from that experience, that they would automatically want to get rid of that baby. That is not entirely true either. There are women who have been raped who do not consider abortion, or would not have considered abortion if they had not been put into a situation where they felt that they had no support to have a baby.

I met a 19-year-old girl who was raped and fell pregnant. She was basically abandoned by her family because she would not agree to have an abortion. The mother toddled her along to the clinic. That girl said to me, 'Ann, my baby didn't commit a crime. My baby is being punished for the crime of the person who raped me.'

So, there are always two sides to these stories. There are always different circumstances, women who cope with different things in different ways, and I do not believe that the arrangements that we have around abortion manage the side of the female population who would rather keep their baby than have an abortion but do not quite know how to go about it, or would rather have their baby and adopt it out than go through the trauma of an abortion.

I have seen this in my own family and I have seen it in my years in drug treatment. Nobody picks up the pieces of this. We just had a list from the Hon. John Gazzola of all of the services that are available for women who are planning to have an abortion, have had an abortion, have lost a baby, etc. The fact of the matter is that these young women are not referred to those services, they are left to flounder on their own most of the time. These young girls end up very depressed, they feel ashamed and they feel guilt, and a lot of them turn to drugs and alcohol to try to forget the trauma of it.

We are basically in here tonight saying that none of that exists, that none of that happens and that this is all about pro choice. I am all for women having choices. I, personally, could not have an abortion, but that is me. As a legislator, I understand that is not the road we go down. I understand that there are women who would choose to have an abortion and I do not condemn them for that, but I also understand that there are women who, with the right sort of counselling, the right sort of assistance and the right kind of information, would be able to make an alternative choice that actually suits them and will help them to move on with their life in a much more functional way.

I support this bill. I support the sentiments of it. While we are talking about 5,000 babies in South Australia that are being aborted, on the other hand we are talking about access to reproductive technology for gay and lesbian couples. Does nobody else see the contradiction here?

We hear from the Hon. Tammy Franks, and I agree with her, that there are many children out there who are caught up in the state system. Those children are not offered for adoption. Let us not kid ourselves. It is not that people would not adopt them, it is that people are not given the opportunity to adopt them, even foster parents who express a need or a want to take on a child in that role are not allowed to do it.

All of those other arguments are peripheral to what this bill actually means, and that is that women are given both sides, both options, to make the decision for themselves, the decision that they can live with, and if they want to have the baby and adopt it out a pathway to be able to do that. That is all that this bill is asking. So, on those grounds I support this bill and I am saddened to hear some of the arguments that have been put up here tonight.