

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

October 2022

*Dear Constituent*

Thank you for your email about protests at abortion clinics and New Clause 11 of the Public Order Bill.

As you might be aware, MPs agreed to add New Clause 11 - which would introduce areas around abortion clinics and hospitals (buffer zones) where interference with, and intimidation or harassment of, women accessing or people providing abortion services would be an offence - to the Public Order Bill.

Matters related to abortion are a free vote for MPs, meaning the Government does not ask members to vote a certain way and I can confirm that I voted for the New Clause.

This country has a proud history of allowing free speech but the right to peaceful protest does not extend to harassment or threatening behaviour. The law already provides protection against harassment and intimidation, and the police have a range of powers to manage protests. Like all members of the public, protesters are subject to the law and suspected criminal offences must be robustly investigated and dealt with by the police.

Following concerns about the tactics of protestors outside some abortion clinics, a review was instigated by Government in 2018. This review revealed that anti-abortion demonstrations take place outside a small number of facilities. In 2017 for example, 363 hospitals and clinics in England and Wales carried out abortions. Of those, 36 hospitals and clinics experienced anti-abortion demonstrations. With this in mind, the Government's assessment is that introducing national buffer zones would not be an appropriate response given the experiences of the majority of hospitals and clinics.

The Government has, however, taken steps through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to give police the powers they need to better manage protests, enabling them to balance the rights of protesters against the rights of others to go about their daily business. It is also the case that Public Spaces Protection Orders have been implemented successfully to restrict harmful anti-abortion protests in Ealing, Richmond and Manchester.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*Yours faithfully*  
*Peter Gibson*

PETER GIBSON MP

***Member of Parliament for Darlington***

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