

# Briefing notes on responding to “Abortion Clinic Protest Review”

## Introduction

On 17 January 2018 the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, launched a public consultation on so-called “protests” outside abortion facilities. The consultation is titled: “Abortion Clinic Protest Review”.

This consultation follows SPUC’s successful campaign calling for the views of those who organise and participate in pro-life vigils to be taken into account in the Home Office review announced on 27 November 2017.

The consultation states: “All members of the public or organisations, who have experience of protest activity outside abortion clinics, are invited to contribute evidence to the review.” (Emphasis added.)

This consultation applies to England and Wales only.

## Who should respond?

We are asking those SPUC members and supporters who take part in prayerful vigils outside abortion facilities to respond to this consultation.

Please also forward this briefing to anyone you know who takes part in pro-life vigils but may not receive this briefing from SPUC. Please encourage them to respond too.

## Why this consultation is important

This consultation is an important opportunity for pro-lifers to tell the government the truth about what happens at peaceful, prayerful pro-life vigils.

## How can I respond?

You can respond by completing the online survey at:

<https://www.homeofficesurveys.homeoffice.gov.uk/s/8KA5N/>

Or you can send a response by email to: [ACPReview@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ACPReview@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

Or you can post a response to: Abortion Clinic Protest Review Team, Police Powers Unit, Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

## The deadline for this consultation

The deadline for this consultation is: **Monday 19 February 2018**

## What should I say?

In answering the online survey or in emailing a response, please draw on your own personal experience of participating in a pro-life vigil.

## **The online survey**

Not every question is applicable to those who participate in pro-life vigils, so you are not expected to answer every question.

## **Email and postal response**

Emailing or posting a response gives you an opportunity to write about your own experience of taking part in a pro-life vigil within the last 12 months. Here are some suggested points to cover:

- Your name and address and the name of the pro-life group you belong to or support (if applicable).
- The clinic/hospital where you go for the pro-life vigil.
- Whether you pray outside the clinic/hospital and /or counsel women.
- How often the vigil takes place and how often you attend.
- Describe the peaceful, prayerful nature of the vigils.
- Describe your experience of any opposition to the vigil and any incidents arising from that opposition.
- Describe your personal experience of helping or witnessing a woman changing her mind about having the abortion.
- Describe any follow-up contact you may have had from women who kept their baby or those who did not.
- Include your view on why it is essential that the vigils continue to take place.
- State what it would mean if buffer zones were implemented.
- Add any other experiences.

## **Why pro-life vigils are essential**

The points below are just some of the reasons why it is essential for pro-lifers to be near the entrance to an abortion clinic, offering women a chance to assess their true feelings and access help.

Your own personal experiences of participating in a pro-life vigil are the best things to write about in your submission to this consultation. However, below are some points which you may like to consider including. Please express these points in your own words.

- Women are not always certain that they want an abortion even though they are entering the clinic to keep the appointment for their abortion. At least one study shows that women are ambivalent about abortion and pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>
- Abortion providers do not offer alternatives. The Care Quality Commission report in October 2017 on the Marie Stopes clinic in Maidstone, Kent, revealed a catalogue of abuses and safety violations, as well as a "culture that worked against patient choice".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Askelson NM, Losch ME, Thomas LJ & Reynolds JC (2015), "Baby? Baby not?" Exploring women's narratives about ambivalence towards an unintended pregnancy, *Women and Health* 55:842-858

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.spuc.org.uk/news/news-stories/2017/october/cattle-market-marie-stopes-paid-its-staff-bonuses-for-abortions>

- Women keep their abortion appointments because they feel they have no other choice and they do not know where to go to get the help they need.

### **Measures to stop pro-life vigils**

A number of suggestions have been put forward to restrict or ban pro-life vigils.

- **Buffer zones** are a designated area around an abortion clinic or hospital where pro-life activity of any kind is forbidden. Buffer zones have not yet been introduced in Britain.
- **Public Space Protection Orders** replaced ASBOs and give councils the power to take action against what they perceive as anti-social behaviour. PSPOs are usually given to those drinking or drug-taking in public. PSPOs can be imposed for a maximum of three years, but shorter periods can be imposed.
- **Prosecutions and convictions** have never resulted from pro-life vigils. This is because the law has never been broken. The abortion lobby is complaining that the police have no powers enabling them to intervene in pro-life vigils. It is clear that those opposed to pro-life vigils would like to see new measures introduced specifically aimed at curbing or banning pro-life vigils.

### **Why buffer zones and other measures must be opposed**

The points below are just some of the reasons why we must oppose buffer zones:

- Buffer zones will deprive many women of the life-saving help they cannot get anywhere else.
- Buffer zones would mean that a peaceful, non-threatening person could not stand near the entrance to an abortion clinic. Standing further away would make it difficult if not impossible to approach the women who need help.
- Buffer zones would stop law-abiding citizens from offering help to people in need.
- The introduction of buffer zones means that the state would be stopping people of faith from exercising the duties dictated by their religion to care for those in need.
- Freedom of speech is also under attack in the campaign to impose buffer zones.

If you have any queries or would like help to make a submission to this consultation, please contact: Antonia Tully on 020 8407 3463

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