



Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

DECS Reference: MIN/0332000/22

18 July 2022

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 9 June to the Home Office on behalf of a number of your constituents about abortion clinic protest buffer zones. I am replying as the newly appointed Minister for Safeguarding.

Whilst I am grateful for you sharing your constituents' views, the Government believes that views on abortion are a matter of conscience and therefore holds a neutral stance. It is for Parliament to decide the circumstances under which abortions should take place, with Members voting according to their moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. However, the matter of abortion clinic protest buffer zones is one of public safety. Therefore, the Government's position on them is evidence based and subject to review.

I would like to take this opportunity to set out that the Government is clear that women seeking healthcare advice or staff working in healthcare facilities must not feel intimidated or harassed while seeking help or going to work. Harassment is already a criminal offence and the Government expects the police to intervene in such circumstances.

In 2018, the Home Office conducted a review of the scale and nature of protests outside of abortion clinics in England and Wales. The then Home Secretary issued a statement on the outcome of this review which can be found here: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-09-13/HCWS958>.

The review acknowledged that the behaviour of some individuals outside abortion clinics can cause women distress, and I have every sympathy for anyone affected by such activity when already going through such a personal and difficult process. However, in considering whether action should be taken by the Government, it is right that we consider the information gathered by the review in full, and that decisions taken are evidence-based and proportionate. Local authorities already have powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to implement Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) to create targeted protest buffer zones around abortion clinics or hospitals, where satisfied on reasonable grounds that protests are having an unreasonable and persistent detrimental effect on the quality of life for people in the area. PSPOs have been successfully used this way in Ealing, Richmond, and Manchester, putting an end to the harmful demonstrations women have experienced outside clinics there.

The Government has continued to keep this stance under review. At present, our position remains that it would not be proportionate to implement nationwide buffer zones and that the police and local authorities have appropriate powers to manage demonstrations outside abortion clinics which do cause harm to women accessing their services. Therefore, we are not supporting the proposed amendment to the Public Order Bill.

We continue to welcome and encourage the submission of new evidence that becomes available on this important issue.

Please extend my gratitude to your constituents for taking the time to write in with their concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Solloway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Amanda Solloway MP