**DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**August 2022**

**Abortion rights in the ACT**

Start

*Nb – a 10-minute speech is around 1,100 – 1,300 words (this is 1,200 words)*

Intro

Thank you, Madame Speaker and Minister Berry.

I welcome and provide my whole-hearted support for this important Executive Motion in respect to abortion rights in the ACT.

And I welcome Minister Berry’s announcement of free abortion services for Canberrans.

I want to start by paying respect to anyone in the ACT who has had any experience or is affected by any matter relating to abortion. It is something that is highly individualised, traumatic, emotional, sensitive and personal. I want to acknowledge that I don’t believe it’s possible for anyone, other than the person or people involved in their own decision about abortion, to understand or comprehend the gravitas of any situation involving the termination of a pregnancy.

I also want to start by saying that abortion care is a basic human right.

In 2020 the World Health Organisation included ‘comprehensive abortion care’ in its list of essential health care services.

It is well known there are very dire consequences in countries and contexts where illegal abortions are carried out.

Illegal and unsafe abortions

Amnesty International, a leading global human rights organisation, notes that, and I quote: “criminalising abortions does not stop abortions, it just makes abortion less safe”. Unquote.

According to the World Health Organisation, unsafe abortions are the third leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide and lead to an additional five million largely preventable disabilities per year.

The World Health Organisation further notes that, globally, six out of ten unintended pregnancies, and three out of ten of all pregnancies end in induced abortion. Of these abortions, around 46% are unsafe – primarily those that undertaken in developing countries and places where abortion is criminalised.

I fear that unsafe pregnancies in the US will rise as a result of the Supreme Court decision to overthrow Roe versus Wade. And there is evidence to suggest this will be the case. The World Health Organisation reports that, and I quote: “evidence shows that restricting access to abortions does not reduce the number of abortions. However, it does affect whether the abortions that women and girls attain are safe and dignified. The proportion of unsafe abortions are significantly higher in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws than in countries with less restrictive laws”. Unquote.

Amnesty International notes that access to abortion is one of the most hotly contested topics globally and that the debate is – quote - “clouded by misinformation about the true ramifications of restricting access to this basic healthcare service”. Unquote.

I despair for women, girls and others in the US – and globally.

Over the last 25 years, Amnesty International reports that more than 50 countries have changed their laws to allow for greater access to abortion, largely in recognition of the vital role that access to safe abortion plays in protecting women’s lives and health.

It staggers me that it’s in this context, that a country like the US – one which we often consider aligned with, and akin to, the quality of life and values we hold in Australia – has reverted its laws and taken such a significant step backwards, by about 50 years, to such draconian and discriminatory measures. - Laws which, inherently and unfortunately, discriminate primarily against women and girls, as well as gender diverse people.

ACT response to Roe v Wade

The outcome of the recent Roe v Wade decision by the Supreme Court in the US is something which has sent shockwaves across the globe. It is something which has, quite rightly, forced us to look inwardly and assess what it might mean for our local Canberra community, and more broadly across Australia.

The decision in the US isn't likely to immediately impact Australia, but it does highlight how important it is that we continue pushing for universal, affordable access to abortion and for local rights.

Within Australia, people in all states and territories can have abortions without risk of criminal prosecution or proceedings. I’m intent that we keep it this way.

I welcome and commend the Assembly’s swift action to convene an Inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT. The Inquiry’s terms of reference are comprehensive in considering legal rights, affordability, accessibility – including for marginalised and vulnerable people in our community, and the effectiveness of exclusion zones.

I encourage all members of the Canberra community to provide a submission by the fifteenth of August and have your say on this important matter.

This is an opportunity for us to do more in the ACT to improve access to abortion for all Australians, noting inequalities that exist, including for people who can’t financially afford the procedure, and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds for whom there are other cultural barriers. There is also a stigma about abortion which remains a barrier for many people.

Again, I commend Minister Berry and the ACT Government on today’s announcement and the funding commitment of $4.6 million over four years – a commitment which will remove financial barriers to abortion in the ACT.

I want to ensure that we not only have safe, affordable and accessible abortion procedures available in the ACT, but also that appropriate support services are in place – including for the longevity for which they’re needed. Some people may need intensive support for a short period of time, and maybe intermittently thereafter. Others will need regular support for the duration of their lives according to their particular experience and trauma. We have existing non-judgemental counselling services available and that’s great. However, now is a good time to review the effectiveness of what’s already in place.

I am proud to be a part of the ACT Labor Party who, in the lead up to the 2020 election, made a commitment to significantly reduce the upfront cost of surgical abortion in the ACT, eliminating the cost difference between a medical or surgical abortion.

I look forward to seeing the public submissions that are made, and the range of perspectives, challenges and opportunities that are put forward in relation to the Assembly’s Inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT.

I’m pleased to end on a positive note, with a quote from Marie Stopes Australia’s Head of Policy, Bonney Corbin, who has expressed confidence that Australia is tracking well in access to abortion and, I quote: “we are in such a good place to keep moving forward with reproductive rights in Australia. We could be leading the world in 2030 if we stick to that trajectory”. Unquote.

Thank you.

Ends

References

[Key Facts on Abortion - Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/abortion-facts/)

[The World's Abortion Laws - Center for Reproductive Rights](https://reproductiverights.org/maps/worlds-abortion-laws/)

[Abortion Law in Australia – Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au)](https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/rp/rp9899/99rp01)

[The Right of Abortion - The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/06/the-right-of-abortion/303366/)

[Abortion in Australia - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_in_Australia)

[Explainer: Is abortion legal in Australia and what are the laws in each state? | Health | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/27/explainer-abortion-laws-australia-is-it-legal-illegal-rights)

[Abortion laws in Australia: What are the rules in each state? (sbs.com.au)](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/new-abortion-laws-have-come-into-effect-in-south-australia-what-are-they-in-other-states/g5w55ghaj)

[Reproductive Rights | Human Rights Law Centre (hrlc.org.au)](https://www.hrlc.org.au/womens-rights)

[Women who made abortion legal in Australia say now is the time for further reform - ABC News](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-04/architects-of-abortion-decriminalisation-say-time-more-reform/101201930)

[Roe v Wade, Abortion in Australia: Is it covered by Medicare, state legislation and common questions answered about abortion services in Australia | Explainer (9news.com.au)](https://www.9news.com.au/national/australia-abortion-legislation-state-by-state-explained/3cc73439-658a-4713-b40f-866f71c9a18e)

[INFO\_Abortion\_WEB.pdf (ohchr.org)](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_Abortion_WEB.pdf)

[New abortion laws cause confusion on college campuses : NPR](https://www.npr.org/2022/07/19/1112014281/abortion-laws-college-campus)

[Abortion (who.int)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion)