

The Rt Hon James Cleverly
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

Congratulations on your new role. We look forward to working with you and your Department on strengthening the rights of women and girls across the United Kingdom. Today, we are writing to you specifically regarding the implementation of safe access zones around abortion clinics, Section 9 of the Public Order Act 2023.

As you will be aware, MPs voted in favour of this legislation in free votes in October 2022 and March 2023. As a coalition of abortion providers, medical bodies, and human rights organisations we are deeply concerned that these protections - supported by a majority of Conservative MPs and, according to a recent independent YouGov poll, by 77% of the British public - have not yet come into force.

Across England, the activity which drove support for these measures continues unabated. In Northampton, Nuneaton, and Southampton, women are targeted for harassment when they access a healthcare service or attend work. A full list of sixteen clinics targeted since the Act received Royal Assent is attached at the end of this letter, but activities include:

- A man refusing to leave the waiting room of one clinic, making women feel alarmed and distressed;
- A man who regularly kneels directly outside the entrance of a clinic with his hands in the air;
- Groups of people gathering outside a hospital with false medical information, graphic signs of foetuses and bible verses on a 20ft banner;
- Anti-abortion preachers standing opposite clinics with body cameras and a posterboard reading "*babies are murdered here;*"
- Women being handed leaflets by nuns and a priest on their way into the clinic addressed to "*Dear Mum*".

We know from the genuine pride you took in taking forward the International Women and Girls Strategy while in your previous role that you agree with us when we say no woman should experience harassment as they access healthcare. Your colleagues agree.

We also know from many years of experience of these activities that this behaviour will continue until the law comes into force. It is not a matter of 'silent prayer', it is a matter of seeking to deter and dissuade women from accessing care to which our Parliament has decided they are legally entitled.

We are therefore asking that you to urgently provide us with an update on the timeline of implementation for these zones. Given the amount of time that has now passed, we would like to see firm dates and a list of actions being undertaken by your Department to ensure that the law – as voted for by Parliament – is brought into force.

Ultimately, it is of paramount importance that these safe access zones are implemented as soon as possible. Every day that passes where they are not undermines the legitimacy of the parliamentary process and leaves women and girls open to the most callous of abuse.

We look forward to hearing from you with an update as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jan Wise, Chair of the Medical Ethics Committee at the British Medical Association (BMA)



Professor Kamila Hawthorne, Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP)



Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM)



Dr Raneer Thakar, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)



Jonathan Lord & Tracey Masters, Co-Chairs of the British Society of Abortion Care Providers (BSACP)



Dr Janet Barter, President of the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH)



Clare Murphy, CEO of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS)



Nabanita Ghosh, Medical Director at the National Unplanned Pregnancy Advisory Service (NUPAS)



Louise McCudden, Head of External Affairs (UK) at MSI Reproductive Choices



Jayne Kavanagh & Hayley Webb, Co-Chairs of Doctors for Choice UK



Deniz Uğur, Deputy Director of End Violence Against Women (EVAW)



Jemima Olchawski, Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society



Emma Campbell, Co-Convener of Alliance for Choice



Jane Fisher, Director of Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)



Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK



Richard Angell, Chief Executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust



Dr Jo Grady, General Secretary of University and College Union (UCU)



CC: The Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak MP

Sixteen clinics targeted post-Royal Assent of the Public Order Act 2023

Brighton

Regular 40 Days for Life presence, including in May 2023 and set to recommence in September. This group have moved from a nearby clinic which closed, and have maintained presence for a number of years. Include prominent signs and leaflets with pictures of fetuses.

Brixton

Daily presence outside clinic with 3-5 protestors handing out leaflets and rosary beads, repeatedly approaching women entering and leaving the clinic. Police officers called by local residents, and confusion over the law not being implemented has led to frustration by locals with the police.

Central London

Twice-yearly march (most recently 16th September 2023) culminating outside the clinic. Large groups standing opposite singing, with two people near the entrance to stop women as they enter.

Chester

Semi-regular presence of an evangelical preacher with a *'babies are murdered here'* poster board – he travels some distance from his church. He stands near the entrance and videos all attendees through his body camera. He can be heard in appointment rooms inside the clinic.

Clapham

Weekly presence immediately outside the door including a man who kneels outside the entrance with his arms in the air. Leaflets that say *"Dear Mum, don't do anything to harm your baby today"*.

Ealing

Regular presence has remained within the dedicated space as per the terms of the PSPO. Council set to have to fund the renewal of a PSPO if the law is not brought into force in the coming months.

Finsbury Park

25-30 people from local church marched to outside the clinic in October where they remained for two hours with signs, singing and praying. Groups immediately outside the gate handing out leaflets to women trying to enter and exit.

Leeds

Group of nuns stand outside demonstrating, with increased presence during 40 days for life.

Leicester

A man stood outside the clinic praying for prolonged period. When approached by clinic staff, he handed them a notice saying *"There is an abortion clinic in there, I'm praying for it to close down."*

London East

Weekly presence from priests and nuns with rosaries and leaflets, often talking to clients as they attend. Semi-regular marches of 20-30 people from local church to wall opposite clinic handing out leaflets, praying, singing, and holding signs.

Luton

Weekly presence of people handing out leaflets and praying. Semi-regular presence of a man singing anti-abortion songs in English and Italian with guitar and waylaying clients to speak about abortion.

Merseyside

Weekly attendance across from the clinic, with protestors praying and handing out leaflets. One woman stands immediately outside the entrance and tries to talk to women.

Newcastle

4 protestors standing near the entrance of the clinic, all rubbing rosary beads

Northampton

3-5 protestors by the entrance door every day. They stand close to the door so are unavoidable and they hand out leaflets, reach out for women and stop them to talk to them. Clinic manager has to call police semi-regularly.

Nuneaton

A newly-targeted clinic - man entered the clinic and lingered in the waiting room. Informed staff he was involved in a 'silent protest', and came back again after he was told to leave. Staff and patients were shaken and front door had to be locked and checks carried out on everyone coming in.

Southampton

Common presence led by the man who is being put on trial for breaching the Bournemouth buffer zone. Protestors are often holding graphic signs with fetuses and bible verses on 20ft banners.