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The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP

Dear Premier,

Thank you for all you do to serve our State as Premier.

I write to you in my role as Director of Ministries (State Leader) for the NSW & ACT Baptist Association, a network of 350 churches, to raise deep concerns and questions about the *Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019* that has been introduced to the NSW Parliament.

As an Association we strongly affirm the importance of supporting women who find themselves in difficult situations created by their pregnancy, or whose unborn babies face difficulties surviving post birth, and the complexity and sensitivity of this issue for these women. We also strongly affirm that the lives of the unborn should be treated with the utmost care, as they are among the most vulnerable members of our society. Sadly, we believe the Bill as introduced to Parliament does neither of these things.

The Bill does not adequately address the need for high quality and readily available forms of support for those considering terminations to be able to consider their options and the consequences that flow from them. It affords women facing difficult decisions no protection from the coercion of others and provides no safeguards to ensure they receive unbiased advice and support that would enable them to give properly informed consent.

Further, the Bill manifestly fails to protect the unborn. It allows for abortion well into the second trimester, around 5 months, for no other reason than the mother wants her pregnancy to end. The doctor performing this operation does not even have to ask for a reason. In addition, the Bill allows for late term abortions – so late, in fact that the termination of a pregnancy right up to birth would be legalised. It is disingenuous to claim that this provision is rarely used. It should never have been drafted as a possibility in the first place. Provision for emergency procedures are already captured in Clause 6(3).

In allowing for abortion up to the time of birth, all that the two doctors need to consider is 'that, in all the circumstances, the termination should be performed', on the basis of the undefined 'relevant medical circumstances' and the 'person's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances'. This guideline is so vague and broad that in effect there would be very few circumstances that would not be caught by it. Surely there has to be a better line we can draw.

Further, while allowing for medical practitioners to conscientiously object to performing a termination of pregnancy, the Bill makes no allowance for those who believe a referral to such a service entails complicity in a morally reprehensible action. Indeed, it explicitly requires that the practitioner make known their objection *and refer the patient* without delay (Clause 8), which in itself may be a violation of their conscience.

There is no urgency for this Bill. Abortion is currently lawful in NSW, following the Levine ruling of the District Court in 1971, which has been judicially affirmed in NSW on a number of occasions. Yet this Bill does much more than merely codify the current practice (as some have claimed). It goes much further, significantly changing the framework of how we approach this complex issue in a way that is both unwise and unjust, and with very inadequate process and opportunity for public discussion.

In light of these concerns, we urge you not to support this Bill.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Steve Bartlett', written in a cursive style.

Rev Dr Steve Bartlett
Director of Ministries
NSW & ACT Baptist Association