

Submission
No 22

INQUIRY INTO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE REFORM BILL 2019

Organisation: Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Australia

Date Received: 13 August 2019



MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues
of the NSW Legislative Council
Inquiry into the *Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019*

On behalf of His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Bishop of the Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Australia, I submit:

The Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Australia welcomes this opportunity to address this Standing Committee on behalf of its faithful, up to some 250,000 Australians. The Maronite community is typified by a high level of acculturation and participation in Australian society, and by achievement in many diverse fields of endeavour: not least in parliament, medicine, the law, engineering, business and commerce. The Maronite people are also remarkable for their high level of Mass attendance and fidelity to their Church and to its ethical guidance.

Our bishop and our community have watched with concern the rapid progress of the *Reproductive Health Care Bill 2019*, to which we are entirely opposed. In our view, the fundamental issues at stake here can be answered by considering these two questions: is it wrong to take an innocent life, and is abortion (the deliberate termination of pregnancy other than by attempting to deliver a living child) the taking of an innocent life?

In our view, both questions can only be answered in the affirmative, and hence the Bill should be rejected. This does not end the matter, however. We urge the government of NSW to take steps to assist and support those who are considering the termination of pregnancy to embrace other options, and to encourage the carriage of the new life to birth, at which time arrangements for adoption can be made, if necessary.

We now consider some of the most egregious clauses:

Clause 5 We oppose the passage of this clause as the termination in question is, in our submission, the termination of an innocent life. An embryo develops when the organic being of the parents mingles and unites in a way which is almost miraculous. The embryo is formed from two living human beings, will develop into a foetus, and within about forty weeks should, in the natural course, see the light of day as a human being. It is disingenuous to suggest that the embryo/foetus has been, in that intervening period of gestation, an inanimate object which inexplicably achieves life.

For us, this ongoing creation of life is a precious and beautiful gift of God, and as a gift it should be accepted, protected and promoted. Even some feminists, such as Naomi Wolf, have explicitly conceded the cogency of the argument that abortion is the killing of a real human life. Yet they nonetheless urge that the mother has a right to have that life ended. This is more than repugnant to Maronite sensibilities.

Perhaps one reason that abortion has been tolerated by many who would reject any form of killing the innocent is that it is an absolutely unique form of murder: no other victim is so completely unable to speak for itself, no other victim is so utterly dependent upon another, and no other victim is so faceless. Yet, the principle at stake here is *the sanctity of innocent life*.

The issue is often mischaracterised as one concerning only the rights of the mother to choose, but once we face the fact that the aborted child is a separate life, it is apparent that the mother's rights can never justify the slaying of an innocent child which is afforded no rights – indeed, its very life is extinguished.

So too, proponents of the Bill speak of the mother's right to decide about her own body: but the new life is most emphatically *not* her own body. The mother's foetus may be of a different sex, and often is; or of a different blood type, and often is. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that only the mother's body is in issue.

Clause 6 We are aware that this is an unpalatable truth, but, in our submission, this clause goes beyond even clause 5 in inculcating a culture of death as opposed to one of life. If passed, it will inevitably lead to the horrors of so-called “partial-birth abortion,” and then to what was once unimaginable, but is now being openly canvassed: “post-birth abortion,” a truly Orwellian term for cold-blooded murder.

Further, given that life is often viable from 24 weeks if not earlier (and medical science has been nudging the period of viability ever earlier), why should the pregnancy necessarily be terminated? Why should Parliament not require the child to be delivered and, if necessary, nursed and made available for adoption? This deliberate negligence for viable life exposes the disrespect for life inherent in this Bill. It can only be hoped that should its supporters ponder this, they will change their minds about this clause.

Clause 9(3) It is wrong to make a conscientious objector then provide assistance if the objector does not wish to. This is to refuse to acknowledge that the objection truly is conscientious.

In summary, we oppose this legislation, for which we can see no good purpose, but from which we can envisage much suffering, and a further toughening of an already widespread disrespect for the most vulnerable forms of human life. We understand that some mothers are in great distress at the prospect of giving birth to a child, and are sometimes under stern pressure to do so. This tragic situation provides a compelling reason to offer them support and assistance. It is our duty to oppose the culture of death represented in this Bill, and to play our individual parts in the development of a culture of life.

Dated: 12 August 2019

Yours sincerely,

Fr Joseph (Yuhanna) Azize