

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

As the Minister knows, Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom where women do not have access to safe abortion in the place where they live, and they are really looking forward to a change in the law. The Government have set out that they are talking to Church groups; can the Minister set out which women's organisations the Government have been talking to in advance of this very important and much longed-for change in the law?

Robin Walker Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Scotland Office) (jointly with the Northern Ireland Office)

The hon. Lady makes an important point. I can assure her that we have been engaging with a range of organisations, including human rights organisations, women's organisations and campaignsâ€”[Interruption.] I would perhaps have to write to her with more detail.

Turning to the issue of abortion, one has only to look at the passionate and sincere demonstrations in recent weeks on both sides of this issue to appreciate that it remains a highly sensitive matter in Northern Ireland. I understand that there are many people in Northern Ireland who may, as the hon. Lady says, welcome the change. There are also many who would not. I would prefer, as would the Government, that the Northern Ireland Assembly was considering reforms of Northern Ireland's abortion law. This is, as I have noted, a highly sensitive devolved issue and as such it would be best addressed by Northern Ireland's locally elected and locally accountable political representatives.

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