

REASONS FOR NOT PROVIDING INFORMATION

An exemption applies

An exemption under **section 38(1)(b)** of FOISA (personal information) applies to some of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, i.e. names and contact details of non-senior staff and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in data protection legislation. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

Exemptions apply, subject to the public interest test

An exemption under **section 30(c)** of FOISA (prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs) applies to some of the information requested. It is essential for the Scottish Government to be able to communicate, often in confidence, with external stakeholders on issues such as buffer zones. Disclosing the content of these discussions is likely to undermine their trust in the Scottish Government and will substantially inhibit communications on this type of issue in the future. These stakeholders will be reluctant to share their views fully and frankly if they believe that their views are likely to be made public, particularly where these discussions relate to a sensitive issue, such as buffer zones. This would significantly harm the Government's ability to carry out many aspects of its work, and could adversely affect its ability to gather all of the information it needs to make fully informed decisions.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing officials a private space within which to communicate with appropriate external stakeholders as part of the process of exploring and refining the Government's position and appropriate options on issues relating to abortion buffer zones. This private space is essential so that decisions can be taken based on informed advice. Premature disclosure is likely to undermine the full and frank discussion of issues between the Scottish Government and these stakeholders, which in turn will undermine the quality of the policy making process, which would not be in the public interest.

An exemption under **section 36(1)** of FOISA (confidentiality in legal proceedings) applies to some of the information requested because it is legal advice and disclosure would breach legal professional privilege.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have

found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is some public interest in release as part of open and transparent government, and to inform public debate. However, this is outweighed by the strong public interest in maintaining the right to confidentiality of communications between legal advisers and clients, to ensure that Ministers and officials are able to receive legal advice in confidence, like any other public or private organisation.

Finally, an exemption under **section 29(1)(a)** of FOISA (policy development) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because it relates to discussions about the development of Scottish Government policy on buffer zones. The exemption recognises the need for officials and Ministers to be able to consider fully the development of policy on an issue, such as buffer zones, before reaching a settled public position.

This exemption is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing officials and Ministers a private space to consider the information and evidence available on matters of such importance before reaching a settled public position.

Information Requested

Dear Ms Sturgeon

Re: Mothers with problem pregnancies who want to keep their babies

These mothers need help, but they do not know where to get this help.

The people who stand near the abortion clinics are a lifeline for these mothers and their babies – offering the help that they are desperately wanting and needing – Please do not remove this help from them. The placards which the pro-life people carry are not intimidating and they do not harass.

Many mothers have an abortion which afterwards they deeply regret.

With all the love in our hearts we pray for the unborn and their mothers.

[redacted – out of scope]

With all the love in our hearts, humbly always praying for us all,

I am yours sincerely

[redacted]

Associate President

The Guild of Spiritual Doctors of The Almighty Triune God

Dear Maree Todd & Nicola Sturgeon,

As a young woman living in Scotland who has been watching the progress of the Back Off Scotland campaign as well as having first hand experience of the intimidation and negative effects these anti - abortion protesters can have on women, I feel deeply disappointed that still no legislation has been put in place.

[redacted – out of scope]

However more needs to be done to protect women's rights. Buffer zones need to be put in place. Nicola, you expressed anger over the situation in America but what have you actually done about it?

Maree, you received a letter from over 70 doctors pleading that legislation is put in place to stop anti abortion protestors intimidating vulnerable women. What are you going to do about this?

I hope to hear from you both.

Kind regards,

[redacted]

From: Daniel Johnson MSP <daniel.johnson.msp@parliament.scot>
Sent: 09 May 2022 14:13
To: Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care <CabSecHSC@gov.scot>
Subject: FW: Abortion clinic buffer zones (Case Ref: DJ14010)

Good Afternoon,

One of my constituents has contacted me in relation to buffer zones around abortion clinics. He would specifically like to know when the Scottish Government is going to introduce buffer zones.

I would be very grateful if you could respond to the issue raised and provide me with any other relevant information regarding this case.

Many thanks in advance for your help in this matter.

Kind Regards,

Daniel

Daniel Johnson MSP
[redacted]
danieljohnson.org.uk
Constituency Office
134 Comiston Road, Edinburgh, EH10 5QN

Daniel would like to keep you up to date with his activities in Parliament and in the constituency. You can sign up to receive regular updates and his eNewsletter [here](#).

Your data privacy will be taken seriously. Read Daniel's privacy notice [here](#).

From: **[redacted]**
Sent: 4 May 2022 11:44
To: Johnson D (Daniel), MSP
Subject: Abortion clinic buffer zones

CAUTION: This e-mail originated from outside of The Scottish Parliament. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Daniel Johnson,

I have emailed you before about this issue but I am very concerned about the leaked decision of the US Supreme Court to end nationwide abortion rights in the USA. I would like you to raise this issue in Parliament again because these are the same people in the USA who are anti-abortion that are influencing protesters here in

Scotland to stand outside abortion clinics and protest. Could you ask the Scottish government again to introduce buffer zones outside abortion clinics in Scotland to stop these protests outside of these clinics?

Dear Maree

I have just listened to you speak on radio Scotland and wished to comment. Abortion is probably the most polarising issue in politics.

On the one hand pro life supporters are vilified as misogynistic right wing religious fanatics denying a woman's right to make her own choices and on the other hand we are becoming a nation supporting government sponsored infanticide. Both of these extremes is a distortion of the truth.

But what you said today is also untrue. I quote as far as I can recall "It is totally inappropriate for these women seeking help to have to run the gauntlet of intimidation and harassment of a picket line in order to access a health care facility".

That is a distortion of the truth and a vilification of the people who are peacefully praying for unborn children. In the case of the Queen Elizabeth hospital there is no picket line but a number of people standing outside the hospital grounds across the road praying for unborn children. There is no intimidation or harassment of pregnant mothers. These people are not protesting but peacefully supporting the right of of an unborn child and the need to support the mother carrying her baby. Both are worthy of love and support.

I can understand the view of the supporters of abortion saying it is a woman's choice but I believe it is necessary not present a distorted caricature of those who would hold the opposite view. For that reason I am asking you in any parliamentary debate to ensure the views of both sides are represented in a fair and truthful way.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Dear Ms Sturgeon

I am writing to you in support of the Back Off Scotland campaign. As I'm sure you're aware, Back Off Scotland are campaigning for the Scottish Government to create 150m buffer zones around ALL clinics and hospitals that provide abortion services in Scotland. It's imperative that the government step in to protect our right to harassment-free access to essential medical services, particularly in light of the recent events in the United States.

[text redacted], I grew up watching these fringe groups hassling women coming in and out of clinics and hospitals. **[text redacted]**. I know how frightening and angering it is. I have watched as abortion clinics across the US have closed and practitioners have murdered

because the government stood by and did nothing - this effectually gives some individuals the idea that what they are doing is government sanctioned and therefore, totally appropriate.

Does the Scottish Government think that this behaviour is appropriate? Does it sanction the harassment of women? It certainly appears that it does from my, and my friends' and acquaintances' points of view. We are voters, and WE ARE LIVID. We have had enough of all of this violence against women. We are murdered, harassed, and humiliated. When will it stop? Condemning it in speeches is simply not enough.

This letter comes at the time of anti-choice protests returning to various sexual health clinics around the UK, including Scotland. In 2021, a Humanist Society Scotland survey showed that 82% of Scots believe that buffer zones should be created. But unfortunately the Scottish Government disagree and describe a ban as a 'disproportionate' response. Across the UK, 49 hospitals, GP surgeries, and clinics have had protests outside their gates. 7 of the NHS premises targeted are in Scotland. And in 2019, over 100,000 women went to clinics that anti-choice demonstrations targeted last year. This is absolutely disgusting behaviour and has nothing to do with freedom of speech - it is flat out intimidation, and a ban is certainly not disproportionate. The Scottish Government's reticence to instate buffer zones is a sign that it does support a woman's right to choose, and I am absolutely infuriated by its lack of response to this threat. These 'protests' are nothing but thinly veiled attacks on women's privacy and meant to control and monitor our behaviour in order to keep us 'in line' with outdated, religious, and patriarchal ideals.

Is this how the Scottish Government views women? I have always admired you and your leadership, but the inactivity around this very sensible and fair approach needs to stop. I cannot see how this would set any sort of negative precedent for other types of protests and do not understand why nothing has been done.

As a result of Covid-19, some people having abortions are having to attend appointments alone – meaning they may not have the support they need to cope with this type of presence. Some women have no support at all, and they have every right to attend these appointments without outside influence or harassment.

The type of activity differs across the country, and they're organised by many different groups. There are people who stand outside hospitals with graphic posters and signs, people who approach service users and passers-by and give out false messages about abortion care and vaccines, people who shout at patients and intimidate them, telling people who have had abortions that they will get cancer.

The clinics and hospitals targeted do not exclusively offer services related to abortion, therefore any anti-choice activity is not targeted exclusively at people seeking this element of healthcare. Such clinics often offer services to victims of sexual assault, services regarding menopause and premenstrual syndrome and gay men's clinics to name just a selection. These visitors may prefer to remain anonymous or may be vulnerable to approaches from anti-choice individuals. The presence of anti-choice activity at such close proximity to the entrance of the medical facility therefore risks preventing a range of people from accessing vital healthcare. For visitors with mental health issues, learning difficulties and past trauma, it can already be difficult to access this type of healthcare, even without physical barriers, and missing appointments can be severely detrimental to their long-term health and wellbeing.

Buffer zones would put a stop to this harassment – moving anti-choice activity away from the clinic and hospital gates and allowing people to access care free from harassment, alarm, and

distress. Anti-choice groups would still be able to protest outside Holyrood, on the High Street, on the internet – but wouldn't be able to target individual patients who are trying to access legal, essential services.

Why does the Scottish Government feel the need to allow these groups to protest at medical facilities that are KNOWN to have vulnerable individuals entering and exiting?

Buffer zones like this are already in place in three English councils, and have been upheld by two separate courts. In Ealing in London, a persistent protest over many years led to an atmosphere of tension, intimidation, harassment, and distress – not just for abortion patients but for people living in the local area too. The council told the court that some of the past users of the clinic were still 'significantly affected by their encounters with the activists' many years on. Judges in the High Court and Court of Appeal in London ruled that a buffer zone was necessary to protect the rights of service users to access care confidentially and without fear of harassment, while only requiring the protesters to move a few hundred metres down the road.

Across Scotland (and the UK), this type of activity continues unchecked. Existing laws are not enough to put a stop to this activity and the police do not have the powers they need to take action. Anti-choice individuals take advantage of the insufficiency and incompleteness of the existing law to impinge on a person's access to care.

That is why I am asking you to support the introduction of a new legal provision, based on laws already in place in Canada, Australia, and the Isle of Man, to move these protesters away from the hospital entrance. Not to stop protest, but to tell them that harassing people trying to access healthcare is not acceptable.

This change in law is supported by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the British Medical Association, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Scottish Humanists, and Scottish Women's Aid.

We would ask for your support and hope to protect anyone seeking vital medical services from harassment and allow patients the anonymity and privacy they deserve.

[redacted – out of scope]

For further information on the campaign, visit their website at: www.backoffscotland.co.uk or email them on contact@backoffscotland.com

From: daniel.johnson.msp@parliament.scot <daniel.johnson.msp@parliament.scot>

Sent: 12 May 2022 15:21

To: Minister for Public Health, Women's Health & Sport <MinisterPHWHS@gov.scot>

Subject: FW: Buffer zones around clinics and hospitals that provide abortion services in Scotland (Case Ref: DJ14034)

Dear Minister,

One of my constituents has contacted me in relation to her support for buffer zones around abortion clinics.

I would be very grateful if you could respond to the issue raised and provide me with any other relevant information regarding this case.

Many thanks in advance for your help in this matter.

Kind Regards,
Daniel

Daniel Johnson MSP

[redacted]

danieljohnson.org.uk
Constituency Office
134 Comiston Road, Edinburgh, EH10 5QN

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Your data privacy will be taken seriously. Read Daniel's privacy notice [here](#).

From: **[redacted]** <**[redacted]**>

Sent: 11 May 2022 17:00

To: Johnson D (Daniel), MSP <Daniel.Johnson.msp@parliament.scot>

Subject: Buffer zones around clinics and hospitals that provide abortion services in Scotland

CAUTION: *This e-mail originated from outside of The Scottish Parliament. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.*

Hello Daniel Johnson,

I am writing today for your support as my MSP in creating 150m buffer zones around ALL clinics and hospitals that provide abortion services in Scotland. This campaign is being run by the Back Off Scotland campaign.

This issue is very important to me and it's imperative that the government step in to protect our right to harassment-free access to essential medical services. This letter comes at the time of anti-choice protests returning to various sexual health clinics around the UK, including Scotland.

The type of activity differs across the country, and they're organised by many different groups. There are people who stand outside hospitals with graphic posters and signs, people who approach service users and passers-by and give out false messages about abortion care and vaccines, people who shout at patients and intimidate them, telling people who have had abortions that they will get cancer.

The clinics and hospitals targeted do not exclusively offer services related to abortion, therefore any anti-choice activity is not targeted exclusively at people seeking this element of healthcare. Such clinics often offer services to victims of sexual assault, services regarding menopause and premenstrual syndrome and gay men's clinics to name just a selection. These visitors may prefer to remain anonymous or may be vulnerable to approaches from anti-choice individuals. The presence of anti-choice activity at such close proximity to the entrance of the medical facility therefore risks preventing a range of people from accessing vital healthcare. For visitors with mental health issues, learning difficulties and past trauma, it can already be difficult to access this type of healthcare, even without physical barriers, and missing appointments can be severely detrimental to their long-term health and wellbeing.

Buffer zones would put a stop to this harassment – moving anti-choice activity away from the clinic and hospital gates and allowing people to access care free from harassment, alarm, and distress. Anti-choice groups would still be able to protest outside Holyrood – but wouldn't be able to target individual patients who are trying to access legal, essential services.

Buffer zones like this are already in place in three English councils, and have been upheld by two separate courts. Across Scotland (and the UK), this type of activity continues unchecked. Existing laws are not enough to put a stop to this activity and the police do not have the powers they need to take action. Anti-choice individuals take advantage of the insufficiency and incompleteness of the existing law to impinge on a person's access to care.

That is why I am asking you to support the introduction of a new legal provision, based on laws already in place in Canada, Australia, and the Isle of Man, to move these protesters away from the hospital entrance. Not to stop protest, but to tell them that harassing people trying to access healthcare is not acceptable.

This change in law is supported by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the British Medical Association, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Scottish Humanists, and Scottish Women's Aid.

If you support this campaign please write to Women's Health Minister, Maree Todd MSP, who has the power to implement this legislation and protect those accessing healthcare from this targeted harassment and intimidation.

For further information on the campaign, visit their website at: www.backoffscotland.co.uk or email them on contact@backoffscotland.com

Kind Regards,
[redacted]

Dear Maree,

Protecting abortion healthcare in Scotland

The Scottish Government has been repeatedly asked to take urgent action to protect access to safe and legal abortion in Scotland. I am sorry to say that the failure of Scottish ministers to take swift and decisive action has led to an increase in protests aimed at women and people accessing abortion healthcare.

By refusing to introduce protest-free buffer zones around abortion healthcare facilities, Scottish Ministers have emboldened anti-abortion campaigners. In recent weeks, this has culminated in an organisation that self-describes as 'the world's largest grassroots movement to end abortion' celebrating a 'great campaign' in Glasgow, which at its peak saw 103 anti-abortion protestors assembled outside the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital.

Enough is enough.

Legislating for protest-free buffer zones at abortion healthcare facilities

It is no surprise that these upsetting events have prompted clinicians and pro-choice campaigners to question the Scottish Government's lack of action. The Back Off Scotland campaign group has called for your resignation and 76 doctors have signed an open letter to you, putting the weight of their clinical expertise behind this vital public health campaign.

It is time to break your silence and make a clear commitment to introduce legislation for buffer zones at abortion healthcare facilities. After all, this was a promise made in

the SNP's manifesto and the Scottish Government's Programme for Government. A timescale is now needed.

Abortion is a basic healthcare need and is fundamentally linked to protecting and upholding the rights of women, girls and others who can become pregnant. It continues to be a hotly contested issue globally, resulting in barriers to safe, free and legal abortion. Under your watch, Scotland is now seen as an easy target by those who wish to end abortion.

The escalation of co-ordinated protests near clinics provides clear evidence that access to abortion healthcare is under attack in Scotland. Please confirm that the Scottish Government will keep its promises and outline when national legislation will be introduced?

[text redacted – out of scope]

Given the high level of public interest, I will be publishing this letter and I would appreciate a speedy response.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Monica Lennon
MSP for Central Scotland

Dear Nicola,

GLASGOW QUEEN ELIZABETH UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

I write regarding an upsetting and distressing scene outside the maternity unit at Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth University Hospital on Sunday 10th April 2022.

Around 100 chanting anti-abortion protestors stood outside the entrance to the hospital grounds in full sight of all those walking or driving to the hospital. These protestors carried a range of posters and anti-abortion placards which contained slogans and images calculated to embarrass, harass and distress those attending and using hospital maternity services and of course the staff who provide these essential services.

As we all know, service users will access maternity services for a multitude of reasons including accessing an abortion, the birth of a child, support and medical care following a stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy or miscarriage. To have patients accosted, shamed, shouted at, intimidated or embarrassed while accessing medical care is wholly unacceptable and could result in some patients avoiding clinically urgent or important appointments for fear of being harangued in this manner at their greatest time of need, to fail to take urgent steps to bring about exclusion or buffer zones outside these facilities will serve only to further harm service users and cause

increased angst and stress for those working to provide care and support to these patients.

I am aware of several approaches made to your government and your ministers from the organisation, Back Off Scotland. We are perpetually holding ourselves out as a country which is open, welcoming and progressive, yet a country which permits patients, often at the most vulnerable times of their lives , to be intimidated, embarrassed and shamed outside the very medical facilities from which they seek care and support.

I would implore you to make urgent representations to your minister with the intention of creating an exclusion or buffer zone of 150m around our hospitals and clinics which provide abortion services. I am entirely confident that Back Off Scotland would take the opportunity to work with you and your ministers and those of us in the civic sector who believe abortion services should be accessible, free of charge and safe to access.

I do of course fully support the aims and objectives of Back Off Scotland and join their call for the above. Let's take this opportunity to build on the creation of a stronger, safer and healthier Scotland. In the interests of transparency, I have posted a copy of this letter online.

Yours Sincerely,

[redacted]

Chair, Welfare Scotland

Dear Maree,

I'm writing regarding reports that more than 100 anti-abortion protesters gathered outside the maternity ward at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow over the weekend. I am sure that you agree with me that getting an abortion is a serious and difficult decision that nobody takes lightly. As a society we should be able to protect and respect those who make such life-changing decision.

The Scottish Government have been exceptionally slow off the mark to address the intimidating protests outside abortion clinics where women are seeking sensitive care, with the scenes in Glasgow suggesting that protests have now reached a new intensity.

Campaigners Back Off Scotland have repeatedly urged the Scottish Government to get to grips with this issue and indeed, questioned your own position as a result of this happening, in their words, unchallenged on your watch.

Abortion buffer zones would protect women during a very vulnerable moment of their lives. In England, councils have the power to implement Public Space Protection Orders themselves, with Ealing using it to create a buffer zone around an abortion clinic. Unlike local authorities in England, council in Scotland do not have the power to introduce buffer zones.

While Ministers have suggested that they would be open to councils applying to them for bye-laws on buffer zones, I believe that councils should have the ability to respond to local circumstances and introduce buffer zones around facilities providing medical care, without the time-consuming process of having to ask ministers for permission.

Every patient should be able to access the medical treatment they need without fear of harassment or intimidation. The Scottish Government should be giving councils the power to protect women. I believe that campaigners are right to say that there can be no excuses for further inaction.

Yours Sincerely,

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP,
Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats

Dear Nicola Sturgeon MSP / First Minister,

I was saddened to see a couple of protestors again outside Sandyford on a clip shared widely on social media.

As you'll be aware, Sandyford provide vital services for all, but notably women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Such actions by bigots will be deeply disturbing to people often already dealing with very challenging and sometimes traumatic situations. I imagine it'll be the same breed of bigots who pop up in the city centre around Pride.

Please confirm if these bigots can be stopped from shouting at members of the public and staff here and what action is being taken.

I am also saddened that I feel unable to raise this with my own MSP, **[redacted]**, given his defence of such actions recently via his Twitter account.

Kind regards,
[redacted]

Dear Ms Todd,

I woke up this morning to the appalling news from the US that the Supreme Court is about to revoke the Roe v Wade law, re-criminalising abortion in all states.

It put me in mind of the dreadful situation here in Scotland, where access to abortion is still difficult and anti-choice protestors are allowed to harrass and intimidate people outside sexual health clinics.

Across Scotland, 70% of Scottish women of reproductive age live in a Health Board with hospitals or clinics targeted by anti-choice groups in the past five years.

This means that hundreds of service users who need abortion care every year are forced to walk past people opposing their right to access legal, essential healthcare as they enter clinics. There are people with microphones who call abortion seekers murderers, people who use their phones to film, people who follow and push leaflets into the hands of healthcare seekers with entirely falsely medical information that abortion causes breast cancer and increases the risk of suicide.

I support the Back Off Scotland campaign which is imploring the Scottish government to create 150m buffer zones around clinics that provide abortion services.

I have written to my MSP Daniel Johnson, asking him to contact you so that you can legislate to protect women's right to sexual healthcare.

Access to safe abortion is a human right. We cannot risk a backslide as we are seeing in the US.

Yours sincerely,
[redacted]

Dear First Minister,

[redacted – out of scope].

Watching events unfold in America should give everyone pause . We already seeing people outside sexual health clinics cause a nuisance of themselves here in Glasgow . The last thing we need in Scotland is more division caused by people invoking “god” **[redacted]**. I implore you to create buffer zones around clinics **[redacted – out of scope]**.

[redacted]

Kind regards

[redacted]

Hi

I wanted to contact you today to express my feelings with regards to the current spate of protest outside healthcare facilities in the Glasgow area. Thea protest have targeted centres where abortions and sexual health care and those accessing these services.

[redacted] These people are often vulnerable and can be victims of violence, exploitation rape and many other abhorrent crimes. To allow these or any other people to be intimidated whilst accessing healthcare is dangerous and a damning indictment of our society today. Whilst I can appreciate that some of these protestors have religious and cultural beliefs, this should not mean they have the right to barrier those in need from healthcare.

I am sure you will have been aware of the protest at the Queen Elizabeth Univeristy Hospital and the concerns that have been raised by a significant number of the professionals working there. This is bad enough and has been discussed widely in the media but there was also a protest today by two individuals the Sandyford sexual health clinic. This clinic covers a large selection of services including the assessment, treatment and counselling of rape and sexual assault survivors. **[redacted]**, the only place in the area, and would be disgusted to think they would be intimidated and traumatised again by dangerously naive protestors. It would appear that police in attendance were under the impression they did not have the power to disperse the protester who were shouting into the building, something which I know many professionals would consider breach of the peace. This noise and disruption caused today left a number of vulnerable patients in tears, damaging the health of patients and meant that services were disrupted as rooms facing the protestors were unsuitable for consultations.

I would ask that you, **[redacted]** support measures to control this infringement of the right to safe access to healthcare. This in includes rules on buffer zones but could also include better guidance for police as to when a protest like this is breaching the rights of others to allow them to respond more positively with confidence.

Thank you for your attention to this email and I look forward to your reply.

[redacted]

Dear Ms Todd

I write in support of the call to intervene against the anti abortion protests that currently occur opposite the maternity unit at QEUH and undoubtedly other sites.

It is downright despicable that these people stand and intimidate and harass women and families accessing abortion. I don't even need to go into all the reasons why this not ok.

[redacted]

Please take the letter from the consultants forward and do something about this.

Good morning First Minister

I watched Monica Lennon's video this morning of protesters outside a hospital in Glasgow and I am frankly horrified.

[redacted]. The distress and trauma of the girls and women at the clinic was palpable. The experience was distressing but on reflection I am thankful there were no protesters. Their presence would have made a truly awful situation absolutely unbearable.

Please consider the girls **[redacted]** and women who have a legal right to this service and who deserve to be protected from the 'judgement' of so called Christians and introduce buffer zones.

I was so pleased to see your tweet about Rowe v Wade but tweets don't change lives, actions do – please do more!

Thank you
[redacted]

Hello,

[redacted]

Regarding the recent developments in America, I believe it would be in your best interest to introduce 150metres buffer zones around practices that offer abortion services. People are being harassed (today, outside Sandyford, men are shouting so loud that patients there for rape therapy cannot hear the practitioners.) It is unacceptable and a clear form of harassment.

Many thanks
[redacted]

Good evening,

I write in relation to the recent coverage of the Roe V Wade case.

I am horrified and deeply disturbed with the information coming out of this, and incredibly worried for every female on their journeys for reproductive justice not only in America, but here in Scotland.

I believe Scotland urgently need legislation to ensure woman can safely attend abortion clinics without the threat of being degraded and intimidated by protesters.

I myself have witnessed these disgraceful protests outside of The Queen Elizabeth hospital and I find it deeply unnerving that they are allowed to do this. Whilst I appreciate they have a right to pray and protest - Woman accessing these clinics also have rights and they deserve to be heard.

[redacted] So I can only imagine how woman feel driving in and seeing them right outside. As a Scottish citizen I strongly believe and support the many public's pleas I have seen online to introduce a buffer zone law which will enable woman to access these facilities safely and without prejudice.

It is a fundamental human right as a woman that we have control of our own bodies, and it is our right to not be harassed in accessing these clinics.

Regards
[redacted]

I am writing to you as my local MSP, First Minister of Scotland and the Minister for Health for Women to request that one of you explain to me why you have not implemented buffer zones outside hospitals and other healthcare settings to protect women and allow them to safely access abortion services.

I would also like you to explain to me what action you are planning to take to address this issue, if any, along with a timeline for action.

If your intent is not to implement buffer zones can you please outline the actions you propose to take to provide support to those women who are unable to safely access abortion services currently in Scotland I am thinking this will need to include both financial and emotional support to these women and the children born as a result. There will obviously be a link to future provision for addiction services and social services too to deal with the fall out of children born with ACEs.

[redacted]

I realise that this email may seem extreme however I am a believer in looking to history for lessons and the recent situation in the US clearly demonstrates, in my opinion, what happens when these people are allowed to slowly chip away at civil

liberties and womens rights. What may seem to some (although not to me) like fairly innocuous protest by a small minority can slowly, over time become the removal of rights for women to access healthcare as we are now seeing in the US.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Regards

[redacted]

Dear Nicola Sturgeon,

I'm horrified at the anti abortion protests taking place at hospitals. Please introduce legislation to stop this happening at hospitals. Hospitals should be safe havens for all, people attending hospital are vulnerable and seeing protests doesn't give anyone, worker or patient a safe, secure experience.

Kind regards, **[redacted]**

I hope that something can be done to combat demonstrations outside hospitals. This is 2022. Thank you
[redacted]

Dear Ms Todd

Ministerial Working Group – Abortion Buffer Zones

I am deeply troubled that the Scottish Government Ministerial Working Group is considering using statutory powers to 'restrict gatherings' in the context of peaceful, prayer vigils near abortion facilities (Ministerial Working Group – Abortion Buffer Zones minutes: 9 December 2021)

The peaceful vigils, often involving members of Scotland's 700,000 strong Catholic community, provide practical and emotional support to women who may wish to exercise their right to choose an alternative to abortion. This includes support and advice about pregnancy, benefits and housing advice, the provision of food, baby equipment, accommodation, and support with existing children. Denying vulnerable women experiencing an unexpected pregnancy the choice of crucial support would be reckless and deeply inconsiderate. It is a tragedy that women in the most deprived areas of Scotland continue to have abortion rates twice as high as those from wealthier areas.

A crucial point that must not be overlooked is many years of reliable and credible evidence from Police Scotland and NHS Boards who have repeatedly said there is no evidence of harassment or intimidation by vigil attendees outside abortion services in Scotland. A nationwide ban seems out of proportion to the scale and severity of the situation.

Another aspect of this also troubles me. Whereas freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and religious expression and free speech are all deeply held values in Scotland and elsewhere, what impact would such a ban as you propose have on these values? It would seem that enormous free gatherings protesting against climate change, climate justice, demonstrations against the possession and use of nuclear weapons and a plethora of other causes, are not only tolerated – but also even encouraged – whereas a small, prayerful, peaceful group of conscientious, and often religious citizens would be prevented from freedom of association and freedom of assembly. Not all Scottish citizens accept in conscience the practice and law of Scotland since 1967 on abortion. Why can they not peacefully offer their prayers and charity for those pregnant women who request it?

If there are concerns about prayer vigils these ought to be addressed through dialogue and a genuine desire to reach a reasonable solution which meets the needs of all parties, not the criminalisation of peaceful, law-abiding people and prayer.

Yours Sincerely,

[redacted]

Dear Maree,

My name is [redacted] and I am one of the founders of Back Off Scotland – a small, student-run grassroots campaign that wants to see the implementation of harassment-free ‘buffer zones’ around clinics and hospitals providing abortion services in Scotland.

In April, this email popped into my inbox:

“I am haunted by an image from a poster, held by one of the protesters I spotted as I left Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. 2 weeks earlier, at my 20-weekscan, we had had a diagnosis that our much longed for baby had a condition that was 'incompatible with life', meaning we had a very difficult choice to make. The most humane thing for us was to have a termination for medical reasons, which meant ending the pregnancy, delivering the baby and saying goodbye. Outside the hospital as I left, at a required distance but still very visible to all passing them, was 40 days for life protest holding signs and posters. I was in my car stuck at the traffic lights, sobbing, and there were placard and images that I can't forget even now making me feel so much worse about the termination I'd just gone through, and undoing all the good work the health professionals had done to support me with dignity and care. Weeks later that image starred front and central in my flashbacks and I needed to rely on health professionals to get access to counselling and prescriptions to help bring me back.”

No one should have to go through what this woman went through, and it’s almost unimaginable to think that this happened in Scotland last year. But it did, and it still continues to happen every day across the country.

I receive hundreds of emails like this every month from women who share their story with me about the trauma they have endured because of harassment by these anti-abortion groups outside clinics and hospitals.

The levels of harm these groups are causing are untold, and we need to put a stop to this activity taking place at the doors of hospitals. This is why Back Off Scotland, along with the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and 38 other women’s rights organisations are supporting Gillian Mackay as her buffer zone bill makes its way through the Scottish Parliament.

I’m really keen to meet with you to discuss the campaign further, tell you about the experiences of women who have been traumatised by these anti-choice groups, and answer any questions that you may have about Gillian’s Bill or the campaign. Please do get in touch if you would like to arrange a meeting, or if you would like any further information.

Best wishes,

Dear Ms Sturgeon,

I am writing to you to ask when the Scottish Government plan to introduce buffer zone legislation to protect women (and non binary people and trans men) from harmful and cruel presence of protesters outside healthcare facilities.

I respect the right to protest and the right to pray, but these have to be aimed at lawmakers not at people accessing healthcare.

We need to destigmatise abortion and ensure it is free, on demand, and without apology.

Please act to protect women who access this human right

Best wishes,

Dear Ms Sturgeon,

[redacted – out of scope] I would like to urge you to advance legislation and other measures for the protection of abortion services in Scotland, including but not limited to buffer zones around clinics and hospitals providing such services. I feel this is especially important given recent developments in the USA and the likely attempts of US-based and funded anti-choice organisations (as well as ‘independent’ UK ones) to step up their efforts to harass and intimidate women in Scotland seeking medical advice and assistance with their reproductive health.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

[redacted]

[redacted – out of scope]

Dear Maree,

We write in relation to the recent campaign of harassment of women accessing abortion services in Scotland as part of a coordinated religious campaign. I am sure you will be aware of the specific protests outside the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow where over a hundred individuals coordinated attempts to intimidate patients and staff on the basis of their worldview that other individuals should be barred from having the choice of safe, legal and regulated abortion services.

These regular attempts to block women and girls from timely access to abortion services, which are legal and a necessary healthcare provision, cannot be allowed to continue. We raised this issue in our manifesto shared with political parties ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament election. We welcomed the statement made in the Scottish National Party's manifesto that: *"We are clear that those accessing abortion*

services should not be targeted for choosing to access this right."

We note the Scottish Government's Women's Health Action Plan, published August 2021, which said on this matter: *"NHS, Local Authorities, Justice agencies and Scottish Government to work together to find ways of preventing women feeling harassed when accessing abortion care due to protests or vigils."*

However we are dismayed that almost a year has progressed since the 2021 election and no timely action has been taken to stop harassment of women and girls accessing legal health services. We echo the sentiments of the 76 consultants who released a joint statement this month calling for urgent action now.

We have read with interest the December minutes of the Ministerial Working Group on this issue. However the minutes reveal the group would appear to be focussed on longer term actions involving more research etc. While this may be appropriate to do, lack of immediate action alongside this will result in continued negative outcomes for individuals accessing healthcare provision, as is their right.

We implore you to take urgent action now, alongside your ministerial colleagues, to end the harassment of women and girls accessing healthcare services as well as healthcare workers. This important issue cannot be left to a working group to consider for any more years.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Humanist Society Scotland

Dear First Minister,

I am writing to express my support that barriers of at least 200 meters or an eighth of a mile need to be erected around hospitals and clinics. There is growing news of the small group of anti-choice individuals are harassing people seeking contraception and abortion services. I choose to call this harassment and not protest. Protest and opinion expression is directed at law makers, this entitlement of opinion and intimidation of those seeking and providing care is none other than harassment. If action is not taken now, we could end up sleep walking down the same path as the United States where harassment and often violence was accepted by American society of those seeking contraception and abortion services. Scotland does not want to be like America in this regard.

I believe, the inaction by the Health Minister, Ms Maree Todd, MSP, may due to society's historic judgement and moral hang ups about those seeking and providing this type of care. I do not believe the government would tolerate "protestors" at blood transfusion centres or even other potentially, voluntary care such as dental clinics.

I implore you to consider proper legislation, enacted by Edinburgh Council to enact these barriers. As a human being, regardless of gender, I have the inalienable right to seek legal medical care without fear of bullying or harassment. Our wonderful NHS doctors, nurses and staff have the employment rights to work without the fear of reprisal, violence, bullying or harassment. As a society, we protect other public

workers like bus drivers, this same legal protection should be extended to those in the medical field.

Legislation protecting medical facilities by creating barriers must be enacted now.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards

[redacted]

Dear Ms. Sturgeon,

As a woman and progressive leader, we beg you to call an emergency session in Parliament and introduce buffer zones around abortion clinics.

[redacted – out of scope]

Not only will these measures greatly aid women in terminating pregnancies (whatever their reasons may be): they will also send a strong, urgent signal to anti-choice activists this side of the Atlantic that their nonsense is not going to make inroads in Scotland.

This is of the utmost importance.

Please act now.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Dear Maree,

I am writing to you to ask for some clarification.

[redacted – out of scope]

The reason I ask is because of your total deafening silence around the recent harassment of women outside maternity hospitals & sexual health clinics by forced birth activists. You have been tweeted on... multiple occasions by both myself and others, bringing to your attention the intimidating and harassment that is ongoing and is only being emboldened by your silence and inaction.

You have said basically nothing apart from a few short lines responding to Monica Lennon in parliament.

You haven't even publicly condemned the actions of the group of individuals responsible for the ongoing intimidation and harassment, or even acknowledged that it's on your agenda to do something about it.

[redacted – out of scope]

I look forward to hearing your response.

Regards,
[redacted]

Good afternoon Ms Todd,

I am writing to you in relation to the current harassment from anti-abortion protesters being experienced by women accessing healthcare at Scottish hospitals and clinics.

In a progressive, modern country I cannot comprehend how people can be allowed to protest outside such places causing upset to women who are often experiencing extremely traumatic events.

This should not be devolved to local councils meaning a lack of consistency across the country. I also cannot comprehend why the Scottish Government need to undertake a study, wasting taxpayer money to decide if it's right women should be harassed whilst accessing healthcare (it's not, by the way - and I didn't need to undertake a study to come to that conclusion).

People should of course have the right to protest - but not in proximity to clinics and hospitals.

[redacted – out of scope]

I really, really hope you can see sense. I personally have never experienced what some of these women have had to endure - but I will always fight for women and against people trying to police our bodies.

[redacted – out of scope]

[redacted]

Hello,

I just read the BBC article on abortion demos outside QE hospital in Glasgow and noted your comments. I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you for taking the action to condemn this behaviour and support the members bill on buffer zones.

[redacted] I'm particularly sensitive to this topic as I've seen such an extreme resulting in harassment, threats and clinician murders around this subject in America and it haunts me to this day. In 2022, to think that females are being prevented or intimidated to access reproductive health, at a time when they may need it most, frightens me. I've been so pleased and privileged to see this is not an issue in the UK and I thank you for supporting these anti-discrimination & anti-harassment measures going forward. Please do get in touch if I can do anything to help directly.

Thank you again,

[redacted]

Dear Nicola,

[redacted]

[redacted] I do not believe it is acceptable in any circumstances for people using vital services to be harassed, verbally abused, called murderers, told they are going to hell and judged, as well as having to suffer through a barrage of utter nonsense and lies! The anti-choice movement is infamous for spreading false information, propaganda, and sensationalised examples to scare and shame anyone who has the capacity to become pregnant, and I think it is extremely important that the government take a stand against this vile, and hate-fuelled movement to show their constituents exactly how they do feel about it.

By not taking a stand, and by not protecting the vulnerable people in our communities who need these vital services, **your government is siding with the anti-choice**. If we don't do something now, the problem will continue to worsen. This is not the message that we want to stand behind.

Kind regards,

[redacted]

I am horrified at the protests outside hospitals by those anti abortion. Hospitals should be safe havens for all attendees. All patients, by definition, are vulnerable and staff too work in a stressful environment. Protesting outside hospitals is really the lowest of the low and should be stopped by your government. Regards, **[redacted]**

Dear Ms. Todd,

Unfortunately, as I read in the Daily Mail the incessant, menacing anti-life activists such as politician **[redacted]**, are again stirring up their hatred towards peaceful pro-life volunteers that give up their time to help women in pregnancy crisis.

I don't pretend to understand their unnatural zeal to killing the unborn and hatred and determination at stopping people helping women in pregnancy crisis outside hospitals or clinics:

[redacted – out of scope]

Do they think because pro-lifers do not retaliate with the hateful vengeance shown to them, that we will just roll over when she attacks us publically and so viciously, and somehow not take legal action over this?

Whether or not all or any of the above suggestions apply, we leave it to the courts to uncover and expose, over legal challenges on unprovoked attacks on pro-lifers eg illegal, undemocratic and disproportionately, discriminating against peaceful law abiding pro-lifers only, with imposed buffer zones and the venomous comments made from politicians during the recent Scottish parliament Gillian Mackay buffer zone debate.

Sure pro-lifers are humble non-judgemental peaceful loving people and their motivation is out of equal love and compassion for all (baby and mother included), but we have as much right to our peaceful legally organised and orchestrated events, wherever required, ie outside hospitals and clinics, our right to freedom of speech, religion, assembly and so on. We have as much recourse to the law. Not only is the law on our side- on the side of truth, but the populace are also on our side. But most formidable God, is on our side.

SPUC has already made it clear to the Scottish Government that its is illegal to impose discriminatory buffer zones and totally unnecessary as per QC .COSLA and Police Scotland also agree as does So why still this continual bloody-mindedness of hatred and threatening behaviours from some MSPs?

So no, let me be absolutely clear, none of us pro-lifers need to ever fret over continuing our much needed and vital work of helping women from unwanted, coerced or unnecessary abortions and the horrendous abortion induced post traumatic stress symptoms and social and economic fallout. We stand firm and undeterred by the incessant harassment, hatred, defamatory slurs on us and our religions, and persistent threats of imprisonment from illegal censorship buffer zones from any politicians or perpetrators. It seems some pro- abortion supporters just can't accept another point of view and even deride and viciously complain about our adverts and plaques, with offers of help to women and others gave messages of love and compassion- quotes from Jesus Christ. Was Jesus " a liar, shameful.. vile... uncompassionate threatens and harrasses vulnerable people etc" as the pro-abortion supporters including MSP assert. No of course not, yet the vitriol, blasphemous, bigoted, toxic slurs keep coming from these pro-abortion activists.

Evidence demonstrates time and time again, as always it's the pro-lifers at these vigils that are victims of abuse, bullying harassment, vicious, bigoted and threats

from anti-life politicians and media and trolls. Not the other way around as wrongfully betrayed by biased legacy media. Nor do these bias media acknowledge the prolife stance, that happens also to be that of the majority.

[redacted – out of scope]

Being accessible to those that need us is key, and that is why prolife help is available where needed i.e outside (or better still, inside) the hospitals and clinics where women in pregnancy crisis or those suffering from abortion fallout, including abortion induced post traumatic stress syndrome can reach us). The proof is in the lives saved because of our prolife interventions, shows time and time again how necessary and vital our services are. **[redacted – out of scope]**

[redacted – out of scope]

We stand accused of preventing women access healthcare? Yet not one women in history has been prevented from accessing healthcare in any setting. Police Scotland also confirms no prolifer has ever caused, partake in any aggressive, violent, harassment or threats to anyone around the hospitals and clinics, where they peaceful pray and offer help. Logic tells us its implausible, especially for the elderly prolife volunteers to stop mid stream praying to cross a very busy and noisy main road, randomly chasing cars into a general hospital such as QEUH, in the off chance they can threaten and bully someone going for an abortion? Video evidence eg utube video from Richard Lucas of the Scottish Family Party confirms this but also pro-abortion supporters lying about their claims of harassment from proliferers.

[redacted – out of scope]

Additionally it is worth noting, that many of the thousands of prolife volunteers on these prolife vigils , come from all walks of life from lawyers, psychiatrists, clergy, healthcare professionals, taxis drivers, dinner ladies, teachers, and so on also get involved in other charitable events. For example fund raising for their churches to support hospices, food banks, alcohol and drug counselling etc. If they were appended by buffer zones, the loss and economic impact to the Government would also have a noticeable financial impact, not to mention the increased suffering of the most vulnerable in society.

[redacted – out of scope]

So hopefully, not before too long , the Government comes to realise the best for all is a " live and let live" approach.

Kind Regards,
And May God help guide you.

[redacted]