

## Bill to repeal Eighth Amendment launched as Coppinger says free vote issue is "ludicrous"

The bill will be brought before the Dáil tomorrow.

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A BILL TO repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution was launched by the Anti-Austerity Alliance/People Before Profit today, who said they hoped supporters of the bill will lobby their local TDs on the abortion issue.

Ruth Coppinger TD and Bríd Smith TD were joined by Ailbhe Smyth of People Before Profit, Dr Rebecca Gomperts of Women on Web, Maebh Hennelly of ROSA and Goretta Horgan of Alliance for Choice for the launch.



The Eighth Amendment acknowledges the right to life of the unborn, equating it with the mother's right to life. When it was introduced, it was heralded as a victory for pro-life campaigners in Ireland.

Pro-choice campaigners are seeking to have a referendum on this amendment as if it was removed it could pave the way for new laws on abortion in Ireland.

Coppinger said that they wanted to get this bill announced early because it gives organisations and individuals 100 days to lobby their local TDs "to campaign and pressure to have this bill passed".



Ruth Coopinger TD and Brid Smith TD

Source: Sam Boal

Smith, who is co-sponsor of the bill, said that the launch of the bill is a “historic moment for women in Ireland”. The first stage of the bill will be announced tomorrow.

“I think it’s really important that the issue goes to a very straightforward vote: do you want to repeal the Eighth Amendment or do you not want to repeal the Eighth Amendment,” she said. She was critical of the idea of a citizens’ assembly on a referendum on the Eighth Amendment, which has been planned for this autumn.

And the idea that some kind of a citizens’ assembly will get us all sorted out and some kind of a consensus on this is nonsense. There isn’t consensus on the question of repealing the eighth – you either repeal it or you don’t. And the citizens’ assembly that really matters is the one that we are here to represent today, that is the people who elected us have elected an assembly across the road in Dáil Éireann to make these decisions.

She said the Dáil should make a decision on the eighth instead of “pushing this very urgent issue down the road”.

We will be campaigning very, very hard indeed to make sure that the voice of women and young women in particular is heard in this country. It’s far too long since they have been pushed aside and silenced.

Dr Gomperts’ organisation Women on Web was one of the organisations involved with yesterday’s ‘abortion drone’ which was sent with abortion pills from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland. She pledged her support for the bill.

Gomperts said that there are no new events similar to the ‘abortion drone’ flight planned by Women on Web in Ireland.



Dr Rebecca Gomperts

Source: Sam Boal

She said her organisation receives hundreds of emails from Irish women every month, women who don't have the money to travel abroad for an abortion. "From these emails, we read that where abortion is illegal, like in Ireland, it is the poor women who are suffering, minors, the ones who don't have access to education, they don't have contraception and they don't have the money to travel abroad," she said.

A long-time campaigner on this issue, Smyth described Ireland's human rights record in relation to abortion as "embarrassing".

"We have not been given the opportunity to vote in a straightforward way... to give our views as to whether or not now we wish to repeal the Eighth Amendment," she said.

ROSA activist Maebh Hennelly said they consider the citizens' assembly as a "delay tactic" and that young people also need comprehensive sex education and access to affordable contraceptive.

Horgan, from Alliance for Choice, said that what happens in the Republic of Ireland has an impact on the north of Ireland. She noted that there are two cases currently going through the courts in the north related to abortion.

### Free vote on abortion



Source: Sam Boal

The Dáil is due to vote next week **on a separate bill**, tabled by Independents4Change TD Mick Wallace, which would allow the termination of pregnancies in cases of fatal foetal abnormality.

Similar legislation was presented by Clare Daly, also of Independents4Change, last year. It was voted down.

It was reported today that a number of ministers in the government are seeking a free vote on Wallace’s bill, including members of the Independent Alliance. A free vote is being allowed by Fianna Fáil.

Asked about the free vote issue, Coppinger said today:

“It’s funny how the question of a conscience or free vote seems to come up when it relates to women, but it’s never a problem when it’s austerity being inflicted on whole sections of the population including women.”

She said that it “is just ludicrous”. “Obviously this is being designed to allow a number of new ministers, who were pro-repeal the eighth before they went into this government, and not to have them squirming. I just reject this whole idea that we need free votes just when it comes to issues like this.”

A government spokesperson said earlier there was an agreement in the programme for government for a free vote only in relation to events after the planned Citizens’ Assembly.

He said there was an expectation the independent ministers would adhere to their pledge in the programme for government, which they signed up to.

**Earlier this month**, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said there must be “consensus” before the issue of the Eighth Amendment can be addressed, and that it must be done “without rushing”.


At the Celebrate the 8th pro-life gathering in Dublin early in June, campaigner Cora Sherlock said that they wanted to talk about the lives saved by the amendment.

- Additional reporting Christina Finn

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