

**FROM: MRS L ROGERS
CPL DIVISION
20 OCTOBER 1998**

cc Mr Hill
Mr Coleman

MR SMITH, DHSS(NI)
MR WHITE, CJPB

ABORTION LAW MINISTER'S CASES

I have agreed that while the abortion issue is entangled with that of the progress of the Northern Ireland Bill I will provide replies to all the Minister's Cases received and to those "treat officials" that are addressed to the Secretary of State.

2. I would, therefore, be grateful for urgent comments on the attached draft reply. (There seems to be a letter writing campaign in full swing and so a standard reply seems the best way of providing a timely response).

3. Some of the Minister's Cases received are addressed to the Secretary of State, most to Mr McFall and one or two to Mr Ingram. I would be grateful for any views on whether Mr McFall should respond to them all or whether the replies should be prepared for whichever Minister is the original recipient.

Signed

LINDA ROGERS
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DU/LR(ABORTION LAW MIN CASES)

STANDARD DRAFT REPLY ON ABORTION

Thank your for your letter of [.....] which enclosed one from your constituent [.....]. Your constituent is concerned that we have plans to liberalise the abortion law in Northern Ireland against the wishes of the people there.

I should say at once that the Government has no intention of imposing any changes in Northern Ireland on what we recognise as a most sensitive and difficult issue.

The law on this matter in England and Wales is governed by the Abortion Act of 1967. This Act has never been extended to Northern Ireland where the law is still governed by a combination of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 1945 and certain case law.

We are aware of a body of opinion in Northern Ireland that considers the current law on abortion there to be either unsatisfactory or unclear but we also recognise the strength of feeling for retaining the existing legislative provision.

DU/LR(ABORTION LAW MIN CASES)

In such circumstances the Government recognises that any change to the law can only come about at the request of a broad cross-section of the people who live there. If they wish to retain the existing legal provision then it is their entitlement to do so.

I hope this will reassure your constituent that we have no intention of forcing any change on the people of Northern Ireland and will continue to honour their wishes in this matter.

DU/LR(ABORTION LAW MIN CASES)