
MPs support call to scrap Victorians' abortion law

Kat Lay Health Correspondent

Moves to decriminalise abortion gained ground yesterday when MPs voted for a bill that would scrap a Victorian law making terminations illegal.

Under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, a woman procuring an abortion can face life imprisonment. Doctors who help women to terminate a pregnancy without meeting certain conditions also can face sanctions.

Presenting the bill, Diana Johnson, Labour MP for Hull North, said: "There is no other medical procedure in this country governed by legislation this old, this out of step with medical developments and public attitudes."

Her bill is backed by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and the Royal College of Midwives.

Maria Caulfield, Conservative MP for Lewes, who opposed the bill, said

that it "would be a charter for unsafe abortion practices not dissimilar to the back-street abortions which the Abortion Act supposedly meant to end".

She told MPs that decriminalisation could lead to terminations being performed at later dates, gender-selective abortions or abusive partners coercing women into having terminations.

In 1967, fresh legislation allowed women to terminate pregnancies if they had the agreement of two doctors and that it took place on registered premises. The law was last updated in 1990, when the legal limit was reduced from 28 weeks to 24 weeks.

MPs voted 172 to 142 in favour of the bill, which will receive a second reading on March 24.

Life, an anti-abortion charity, said that it was disappointed by the decision and added that removing legal restrictions could cause an "operational and procedural free-for-all".

Times March 14th 2017