

# MPs seek to ban late abortions for cleft lip and palate

**Andrew Gregory and  
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Late abortions for cleft lip, cleft palate, club foot and other minor abnormalities should be banned, a cross-party group of MPs is to argue this week. The conditions are treatable, but abortions still take place after the usual limit of 24 weeks. Babies with an abnormality can be aborted up to the due date.

A bill led by the Tory MP Fiona Bruce and backed by a dozen MPs will be presented in parliament on Wednesday.

A cleft lip and palate is the most common facial birth defect in the UK, affecting about 1 in 700 babies. A cleft lip is usually picked up at between 18 and 21 weeks.

About 75 abortions were recorded between 2011 and 2018 in England and Wales for either cleft lip or cleft palate. Famous names including Steven Gerrard, the former England football captain, who was born with a club foot, and actor Joaquin Phoenix, who had a cleft lip, have said

their conditions did not hold them back.

Bruce, whose eldest son was born with a club foot, said: "He had physiotherapy every day for the first year of his life and two operations, but now no one would ever know. It is hard to think such a treatable disability could have deprived my son, now in his mid-twenties, of life."

The MP for Congleton said she wanted to ensure no parent felt pressure to abort their baby "for what is clearly a correctable condition".

Lauren Bolt, 26, of Barry, south Wales, whose two-year-old daughter was born with a cleft lip and palate, said it was "time legislation caught up to reflect society's positive change in attitudes towards those born with disabilities, and medical advances".

Jane Fisher, director of the charity Antenatal Results and Choices, said: "We would urge MPs to reject this bill. While many instances of cleft lip and palate will be successfully treated, others are much more severe."



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