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Mr Iain Stewart
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

8th April 2020

By email: iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Stewart,

Thank you for your email dated 23rd March regarding your constituents' concern about the new changes to abortion law in Northern Ireland and the duty under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (NIEF Act).

As the Northern Ireland Executive was not restored by 21 October 2019, the Government was under a clear legal duty under section 9 of the NIEF Act to make Regulations that provide for lawful access to abortion services in Northern Ireland by 31 March 2020.

On 25 March 2020 the Government laid the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 in Parliament. The Regulations came into force on 31 March 2020 and became the law on access to abortion services in Northern Ireland. The Government has also published its response to the public consultation, *A new legal framework for abortion services in Northern Ireland*, which can be found at gov.uk/nio. The Government's response to the consultation also sets out how the Government made its decision on each element of the framework and the reasons behind each of these decisions.

It is the Government's view that the new abortion framework for Northern Ireland provides a balanced and appropriate way to deliver on the legal requirements under section 9 NIEF Act and compliance with the recommendations of the CEDAW Report, and ensures that the health and safety of women and girls, and clarity and certainty for the medical profession, remain paramount in accessing lawful abortion services in Northern Ireland going forward.

The Department of Health in Northern Ireland will oversee the framework's delivery model and the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care board will have overall responsibility for commissioning the abortion services.

Women and girls can continue to access abortion services in England before services are commissioned in Northern Ireland, with all costs, including travel and, where needed accommodation, paid for, with no means testing. This will remain in place after 31 March 2020 until we are confident that service provision in Northern Ireland is available to meet women and girls' needs.

We will continue to work closely with the Department of Health, and other relevant Northern Ireland departments, to progress this work. The Government is also working closely with the relevant Northern Ireland departments, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP, has written to the relevant Northern Ireland ministers, to ensure the implementation of all of the recommendations under paragraphs 85 and 86 of the CEDAW report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Walker', written in a cursive style.

ROBIN WALKER MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND