



## Clinic harassment and safe access zones briefing

We ask MPs to [join us in strongly supporting Amendment 5](#) from the Lords to the Public Order Bill.

This amendment protects women and medical professionals by delivering on MPs' earlier cross-party vote to introduce targeted, human rights-compliant safe access zones around abortion clinics.

We ask MPs to [strongly oppose](#) the motions in the name of Andrew Lewer et al, which would render these protections meaningless and leave women and clinicians subject to persistent harassment.

### The Lords amendment

- Amendment 5 incorporates minor drafting changes to Clause 9 which was inserted into the Bill in the House of Commons with a cross-party majority of 187. It was written by pro-choice Peers and organisations, with legal support and in conjunction with MPs who led on the original amendment. It was supported in the Lords on an overwhelming voice vote.
- In December 2022, the UK Supreme Court unanimously found that a comparable law introduced by the Northern Ireland Assembly was ECHR-compliant, and proportionate to protecting women's legal right to access abortion care. This revised amendment reflects this law more closely.
- The amendment still includes the original Clause's core provisions
  - Every abortion clinic will **automatically have a safe access zone in place** around it,
  - The zones will be a **standard 150m** around clinics and hospitals, and
  - It **applies both to anti-abortion and pro-choice activity**.
- The redraft also has several key changes:
  - It futureproofs the Clause by removing the list of banned activities and focusing on **banning any act which influences, obstructs or impedes, or causes harassment, alarm, or distress** to any person accessing, providing, or facilitating abortion services,
  - It clarifies that **the law applies both to licensed abortion clinics and to hospitals where abortion services are provided** – ensuring NHS services are also protected, and
  - It ensures that **people undertaking activities inside their homes or places of worship are not criminalised**, while ensuring private property is not used to circumvent the law.

### Further motions on the Lords Amendment

We [strongly oppose](#) these attempts to go back on protections already supported by the Commons.

These motions are being proposed by MPs who have opposed safe access zones and their protections at every stage. They are deliberately designed to [limit protection](#) and [leave anti-abortion groups free to harass women at the clinic gate](#). These proposals are [unjustified and actively harmful to women](#).

The second motion would [remove safe access zones from the bill entirely](#) and replace them with a Home Office review – something which was debated and roundly rejected in the House of Lords.

## The problem

100,000 women a year in England and Wales are treated by a clinic or hospital for an abortion that is targeted by anti-abortion groups that cause harassment, alarm, and distress.

The Clause will introduce safe access zones (previously known as buffer zones) – areas around clinics and hospitals that provide abortion care where certain abortion-specific harassment such as displaying graphic signs, following and filming women, and repeatedly approaching women and doctors are not allowed

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*"I came with my 16-year old daughter and her boyfriend. They are both young, confused, and found the praying extremely upsetting. Decisions to take this route are not made lightly... this makes an upsetting situation so much worse."* – **Liverpool, 2023**

*"They came over twice and we said 'no thank you'. She was very pushy, in your face... it has left me anxious as I suffer from poor mental health. When we walked past she said 'Your baby wants to live'. We had driven for 7.5 hours and did not expect this at all."* – **Bournemouth, 2022**

*"This morning the men outside asked me if I work here – I did not respond. As I walked away, he started shouting 'Shame on you, madam, killing little babies, you should be ashamed of yourself...' I'm usually a bit tougher than this but it really got to me this morning."* – **Birmingham, 2019**

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## The inadequacy of existing law

Work to stop clinic harassment has been going on for nearly 10 years. Despite this work, more than 100,000 women a year are treated by a clinic targeted by these groups. The existing law is simply not enough. This is a national problem and it needs a national solution.

Police at local level report being unable to address existing problems owing to a lack of legislation under which they could charge individuals. In many cases they recognise the impact that they have on women accessing services, but are unable to take action.

## Public Spaces Protection Orders

A PSPO is a tool that enables Local Authorities to prevent certain anti-social activity taking place in a certain area. Out of the 50 clinics that have been targeted in last four years, only 5 are protected by a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).

Unfortunately, while PSPOs are a helpful stopgap at a local level, they are not a permanent solution. They **create a postcode lottery** where many other women are unable to access care without harassment. They are **expensive to introduce and uphold in court** – making councils less likely to risk their introduction. And **the evidence bar excludes clinics** from protection because varying tactics and lack of willingness to report can make local action difficult.

In recent weeks, clinics protected by PSPOs have also been targeted by a group of protesters for a week-long 'buffer zone challenge' – demonstrating how using existing patchwork laws can draw attention to sites that many women would rather remained private.

## Support for change

Buffer zones are supported by Royal Colleges, providers, and Violence Against Women and Girls groups including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, BPAS, MSI Reproductive Choices, Rape Crisis England & Wales, and Karma Nirvana.

Northern Ireland has passed a Province-wide law to stop clinic harassment which has been upheld by the UK Supreme Court, and Scotland is progressing with legislation which will be implemented this year.