

Press Release: Abortion Rights leads pro-choice protest over Glasgow Midwives case

10/11/14

Abortion Rights UK is protesting outside the supreme court tomorrow (11th Nov) from 12.30pm over the Glasgow Midwives case being heard inside.

The case centres on two midwives who took NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board to court demanding they be given the right to conscientiously object to a wide range of job functions with distant links to patients receiving terminations.

In April, Scotland's Supreme Civil Court overturned a previous decision and ruled in favour of the midwives, ruling that the two midwives should be given exemptions from 'delegating, supervising or supporting' any staff involved in terminations. NHS GGC have appealed and it is now being heard at the Supreme Court.

Kate Smurthwaite, Vice Chair of Abortion Rights said "This is an incredibly problematic case. It has always been the right of medical professionals to choose not to perform terminations if doing so caused an ethical conflict for them. This state of affairs, though far from ideal, was a compromise introduced to help the 1967 Abortion Act pass.

"Instead patients are referred to colleagues who are happy to treat them. These women however are demanding the right to not work in wards with those who have received terminations. This could mean centres being forced to take on new staff and build separate wards or be forced to close down their abortion services.

"There is no doubt that this case has nothing whatsoever to do with individual staff members private beliefs. This is about demanding the right to disrupt vital medical services provision for ideological reasons.

"We believe it is vital the Supreme Court rejects this case. Otherwise we risk going down the road the USA has taken where abortion remains legal but is nearly impossible to access in many states because of piecemeal rights erosion through cases like this."

Notes for editors:

- * Abortion Rights is the UK's national campaign for a woman's right to choose on abortion.
- * Currently medical professionals can elect not to participate in performing abortions, but not from performing peripheral functions such as basic ward care for patients.
- * Guidelines for GPs who conscientiously object to abortion advise them to refer women to colleagues who are comfortable helping.
- * The midwives lost their first case on the matter but that ruling was overturned in April. More information here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-22279857>
- * Abortion is legal in England, Scotland and Wales provided two doctors agree the procedure is in the patients best interest. Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland unless the mother's life is at risk.