

PE2126/B: Ensure abortion services are available up to 24 weeks across all parts of Scotland

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and Back Off Scotland written submission, 14 January 2025

Dear Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee,

We are writing to you today with regard to 'PE2126: Ensure abortion services are available up to 24 weeks across all parts of Scotland' as presented by Gemma Clark.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), along with Back Off Scotland, supports the petition's aim to ensure that all women across Scotland are able to access abortion care up to the legal limit across all NHS health boards in Scotland.

As the largest provider of abortion in the UK, BPAS along with Back Off Scotland, a grassroots campaign focused on removing barriers to accessing abortion healthcare in Scotland, we are extremely concerned about the rising numbers of women travelling to England to access care¹ they are legally entitled to receive in Scotland, a recent report suggesting that only one doctor in the whole of Scotland is trained to provide surgical abortion care up to the legal limit².

Currently, there is nowhere in Scotland where women seeking abortion care after 20 weeks' gestation can access treatment³. Over the years, thousands of Scottish women have had to make the journey down to England (often London, Liverpool, or Doncaster) to access abortion care that they are legally entitled to receive in Scotland but cannot due to the systematic failure of the Scottish Government and NHS to provide care up to the legal gestational limit.

BPAS have provided care to numerous young girls and women when the NHS in Scotland failed them. Currently, we are seeing between one and two women and girls travelling to us from Scotland per week. Some recent women we treated included:

- A **16-year-old girl** who found out she was pregnant at 23 weeks. Her family were anti-abortion so she had to ask her boyfriend's mother to take her to London for treatment at a BPAS clinic. She says that the '*fear and shame*' she suffered at that time made her **contemplate suicide** to escape the situation.
- A **teenager** discovered she was having a cryptic pregnancy after her contraceptive injection failed. When the local sexual health clinic told her that in order to get an abortion she would have to travel to a clinic in England, she vomited on herself out of shock. She had to pay **thousands of pounds upfront** out of her own pocket in order to pay for travel and accommodation, and had to share her bed at the hotel whilst recovering from the procedure

¹ BPAS, [New figures show score of women forced to travel from Scotland for abortion care](#). 2023.

² The Herald, 'Only one Scottish doctor is trained in surgical care to legal limit'. 2024.

³ [Scottish Parliament, Written Question reference: S6W-14610](#). 2023.

with her recently-divorced parents because she couldn't afford two separate rooms.

- A woman with **addiction issues** found out she was pregnant beyond 20 weeks and that she would not be able to access abortion care in Scotland. BPAS arranged treatment for her in London but she was experiencing very poor mental health, complex addiction issues, and was struggling to leave her home. The woman had **no support available from family or friends**, and her ex-partner was on remand awaiting trial at the time of appointment. BPAS provided her with on-going support during the journey she eventually took **by herself**.
- A **BAME student** found out she was pregnant whilst still living at home. She was unable to confide in anyone about her situation and **was not allowed to spend nights away** from the family home. Travelling to England for treatment meant that she would be away from home for multiple nights, so she **asked BPAS to call her family and explain that she had a compulsory educational engagement away from home**. The teenager felt that her **life may be at risk** if her family or partner found out she had been pregnant.

We have worked tirelessly to highlight the challenges faced by women who cannot access timely surgical abortion care in Scotland. Our advocacy has brought national attention to the plight of women forced to travel to England for these services.

In response to our advocacy efforts, the Scottish Government stated that they would collaborate with any health board willing to establish a surgical abortion service. In 2023, they commissioned the NHS National Service Division to create a specification for the creation of a surgical abortion service somewhere in Scotland⁴. Despite two rounds of attempts, no health board has volunteered to host the service.

The Government has said that they are unwilling to consider commissioning any organisation outside the NHS to deliver this essential care. This is despite a recent article in the British Medical Journal SRH stating that there is an appetite amongst providers to offer the care, but barriers – including systemic abortion stigma within the NHS – are blocking the creation of this service⁵.

This situation is untenable. BPAS and Back Off Scotland support the petition and call for the Committee to hold the Scottish Government to account on their promises to deliver abortion care up to the legal limit across Scotland. Despite years of assurances, hundreds of women are still having to travel, and these are often some of the most clinically vulnerable. We ask that the Committee recognise the seriousness of this matter and that a debate in the Scottish Parliament is scheduled in an attempt to bring this matter to the forefront of Scottish politics.

⁴ Scottish Government, [Women's Health Plan 2021-2024: Final Report](#). 2024.

⁵ BMJ SRH, [Providers' perspectives on barriers to post-20-week Ground C abortion in Scotland](#). 2024.