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Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486) Bill 2005

Attached is the submission of the Queensland Right to Life Association to the Inquiry being conducted by your Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Donna Purcell
President

This submission is being presented by Queensland Right to Life. We wish to argue for retention of the current situation where there is governmental control over the use of RU486. Our reasons are as follows:

1. One of the purposes of government is to rule properly and fairly to protect the life of **all** its citizens. Where it is intended to use RU486 for abortifacient purposes, whether that be in the general populace, or for “trials” amidst a select population, such a use will kill unborn members of the nation’s population. We regard this as primarily discriminatory as there is no scientific doubt about the nature of unborn human beings and their being members of the human race. We see no reason why they should be excluded from the purview of government or the right to protection from the nation’s laws.
2. The government of any country has a legitimate interest in the population base of the country. During the term of this government, there have been initiatives to increase the population, such as through the Treasurer, Mr. Peter Costello’s “baby bonuses”, and the establishment of pregnancy counselling facilities provided through Medicare for women who are considering abortion, or simply wish to have independent advice. It is consistent with proper government that it retain control over an agent that is primarily to be used for disposing of members of the population, since other “medicinal” uses of RU486 are in very small numbers and not in dispute.
3. Another important purpose of government is adequate control over agents that may also have a detrimental effect on other people. No government allows every chemical or other poison to be used and sold freely. There are many laws against the provision of chemicals eg explosives and even fertilizers because of the potential for being misused. These restrictions cause considerable inconvenience at times to legitimate users, but it is considered justifiable for the common good.

It is legitimate to refer to RU486 as a chemical or poison because that is how it works. It is not widely known that some doctors also illegitimately use methotrexate, an agent used for chemotherapy in cancer treatment as a form of chemical abortion. When used for cancer, its purpose is to kill malignant cells. Unfortunately, it also kills normal cells in the process. Methotrexate is often used in combination with Misoprostol marketed in Australia as Cytotec, which is also used illegitimately when used to initiate an abortion.

The TGA has a proper purpose in examining the pros and cons of any therapeutic agent before its introduction. **However, when used as an abortifacient, RU486 is not therapeutic as its purpose is to kill, not heal. The essential issue is not one of comparative safety with so-called surgical abortion, but of human rights and equality under the law.**

4. We believe it is the proper responsibility of the government, not the Therapeutic Goods Administration to decide on whether RU486 is also for the common good of everyone. The whole nation has a stake in the welfare of all its members, born and unborn. All women have a potential to suffer adversely from abortion, whether by chemicals such as RU486, or by surgical abortion. There is ample evidence to illustrate this, but that is not the purpose of our submission or the enquiry, although it is totally relevant to the issue of protection and good governance.

In the case of RU486, many have argued that its provision is simply for the sake of another “choice.” This is not a good enough reason given the risks associated with its use especially in rural or remote areas. The evidence for the adverse effects of RU486 has been presented to the Health Minister, Mr. Tony Abbot. It is also true to say that abortion by any means will always have a certain risk attached to it by its very nature. We do not argue in favour of one type of abortion as opposed to another because all abortion kills an unborn child.

5. There is another reason for not invoking the TGA as the primary authority in the matter, and that is, it is not an elected body. There are many who have no confidence that the TGA would not be influenced by the general pro-abortion milieu which pervades the medical and medically-associated bodies in this country. There is no accountability to the general public on such an issue which goes well beyond issues of a technical nature.

Even on issues of a technical nature, there have been many instances where if the information being provided does not suit the prevailing or politically correct stance on the issue, such information is ignored. During the recent controversial release of research that showed that women’s mental health could be damaged by abortion (Christchurch Health and Development Study), spokesman for the study, Professor Fergusson from the Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, stated that his paper was rejected by several medical magazines simply because it was not what they wanted to hear. If this lack of objectivity on the issue of abortion is a generalized phenomenon, there needs to be another avenue of review.

Conclusion

We believe that it is the duty and responsibility of government to make decisions on matters which directly or indirectly affect the whole populace. If such issues are left with non-elected and quite possibly non-representative bodies, there is no opportunity for proper examination of questions beyond the narrow framework of technical issues.

The current situation of control over RU486 does help to maintain governmental review of an agent whose main use would be to kill, not to heal.