
UK: “buffer zones” around abortion clinics. Mgr. Sherrington, will prayer and dialogue be criminalised?

With the enactment of this proposed legislation, there is a real risk that prayer, peaceful presence, and communication with women who want to have an abortion could be criminalised, or the fact of offering support to them. Bishop John Sherrington, the Lead Bishop for Life Issues for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, voiced his concerns regarding the vote in Westminster Parliament to legalise the so-called 150-metre buffer zones around clinics where abortions are performed, inside which it will no longer be possible to pray or talk to women. Westminster Parliament said “no” (by 299 votes to 116) to the amendment proposed by MP Andrew Lewer, close to the pro-life movement, which would have allowed pro-life activists to pray and approach women inside the buffer zones. “We condemn all harassment and intimidation of women” who have decided to have an abortion, but “the current legislation already protects them”, Bishop Sherrington said. “We are concerned that the new legislation may discriminate against people of faith. We have also stressed that its implications could extend beyond the perimeters of a ‘safe access zone’ and it raises serious questions about the state’s powers in relation to the individual in a free society, both those with faith and those without”.

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