

*These notes refer to the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Northern Ireland) 2023 (c.1) which received Royal Assent on 6 February 2023*

# Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Northern Ireland) 2023

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS**

#### ***Section 5 – Offences in respect of a safe access zone***

This is a key section which criminalises certain behaviour in the safe access zone. This is designed to protect women and staff from being harassed whilst they are visiting an abortion clinic.

There is a broad and a specific offence. The broad offence makes it a crime to do anything in a safe access zone that might influence a person in their decision to attend an abortion clinic, or which might prevent or impede access to the clinic, or which might harass, alarm or distress that person. For example, a protest group handing out leaflets to visitors to the clinic in the safe access zone, or individual protestors haranguing visitors to the clinic, or blocking the entrance point to a clinic.

The specific offence is recording a person who is in the safe access zone if that might also have the effect of influencing their decision to attend, preventing or impeding access, or that might harass, alarm or distress them.

The punishment is a level 2 fine. The punishment does not include a jail term.