

13th March 2015

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about sex-selective abortion.

I understand the concerns you are raising about sex-selective abortion. Please let me reassure you that the Government has consistently made it clear that abortion on the grounds of gender alone is already illegal.

This was reiterated in a letter to all doctors from the Chief Medical Officer for England in 2012, and a further letter in 2013, and was reiterated again in Department of Health guidance in May 2014. However, it is lawful to abort a foetus where two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith, that “*there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped*”. Some serious conditions are known to be gender-related.

All independent providers of abortions agree to operate under the law and the Government guidance as conditions of their licence. Any allegations concerning abortions not performed under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967 should be referred to the police.

I am also pleased that the Government remains vigilant on this issue, examining any evidence – including anecdotal – that comes to light. In 2013 and 2014, the Government published an analysis of the gender-birth ratio. Although there was no unnaturally large variation in any group in either year, the Government has committed to repeating and publishing this analysis annually. To bolster this commitment you may be interested to know that New Clause 25 to the Serious Crime Bill was passed by the House of Commons. This binds the Secretary of State for Health to “*arrange for an assessment to be made of the evidence of termination of pregnancy on the grounds of the sex of the foetus in England, Wales and Scotland.*” In my view this is a positive step forward which builds on the ongoing work currently underway at the Department of Health.

Traditionally, votes on abortion laws are free votes, since they are matters of conscience. I would like to assure you that I believe that sex-selective abortions are unacceptable. As you may know the House of Commons has now voted against New Clause 1 to the Serious Crime Bill. I am glad that MPs have now had the chance to discuss this issue.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP