

Dear Zontians

At the Zonta International 65th Convention held in Hamburg, District 21 proposed a resolution regarding a policy on women's reproductive health which included reference to abortions.

It read:

1. RESOLUTION regarding a policy on women's reproductive health

Rationale:

Worldwide, 25 million unsafe abortions (45% of all abortions) occurred every year between 2010 and 2014, according to a study by WHO and the Guttmacher Institute published in 2017 in the medical journal The Lancet. The majority of unsafe abortions, or 97%, occurred in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Every year an estimated number of at least 22,800 women die from complications of unsafe abortions.

According to the above-mentioned study, restricting access to abortions does not reduce the number of abortions. However, restricting access to abortion causes a higher rate of unsafe abortions and a higher number of women injured or dead. In countries where abortion is completely banned or permitted only to save the woman's life or preserve her physical health, only 1 in 4 abortions were safe; whereas, in countries where abortion is legal on broader grounds, nearly 9 in 10 abortions were done safely.

According to WHO, the provision of safe, legal abortion is essential to fulfilling the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (target 3.7).

Thus, District 21 proposes that Zonta International issues a Women's Reproductive Health Policy with the proposed wording so that Zonta International calls on governments to ensure access to safe, legal abortions.

Proposed wording:

POLICY STATEMENT

Zonta International is an organization pledged to improve the health status of women.

Zonta International calls on governments to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- **the elimination of all child marriages and similar unions**
- **equal rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children and to have access to the information, education and means to exercise these rights**
- **access to health care services, including those services related to family planning**
- **the prevention of unwanted pregnancies**
- **access to safe, legal abortions.**

At Convention, delegates voted to adopt the Resolution with a majority in favour. Whilst the Zonta International Board works to update our Governing Documents to include this result, and other Bylaws changes, Zonta Clubs and Club members may be considering what this means for them, especially with regard termination of pregnancies (abortions).

So, some background for you.

ZONTA: “The Statement on Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health was adopted by Zonta International Board in April 2019. You can find this statement at www.zonta.org under Zonta Statements. ZI Bylaws Article III SECTION 2 states that districts and clubs may express themselves about and become involved in principles and public issues having a bearing on the Objects of Zonta International. This same Article and the Zonta International Glossary define that only the Zonta International Board may adopt or change operating policies outside of the Zonta International Bylaws. General policies (overall principles) found in ZI Bylaws Article III may be adopted or changed by convention which would require a bylaws amendment. Therefore, if this Resolution were to be approved it cannot be a policy but only a statement. “(edited summary from REPORT TO CONVENTION OF THE 2020-2022 ZONTA INTERNATIONAL BYLAWS AND RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE, pp52-54).

QUEENSLAND LAW: <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/asmade/act-2018-023>

“The Queensland *Termination of Pregnancy Act 2018* came into effect on 3 December 2018 and ensures termination of pregnancy is treated as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. The Act:

- supports a woman's right to health, including reproductive health and autonomy
- provides clarity and safety for health practitioners providing terminations of pregnancy
- brings Queensland legislation in line with other Australian jurisdictions.”

NEW SOUTH WALES LAW:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/women/pregnancyoptions/Pages/abortion-bill-summary.aspx>

“The New South Wales *Abortion Law Reform Act 2019* ensures termination of pregnancy (abortion) is treated as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. The Act:

- establishes a health centered approach for abortion
- supports a woman's right to health, including reproductive health and autonomy
- provides clarity and safety for health practitioners providing abortions.

Under the Act, informed consent must be given by the woman or, if the woman lacks capacity, a person lawfully authorised to give consent on the woman’s behalf. It is noted that, unless it is an emergency, if a woman over 16 lacks capacity consent must be obtained from the Civil and Administrative Tribunal under the Guardianship Act for the performance of a termination.”

Both NSW and Queensland Acts allow termination of pregnancy **up to 22 weeks** by a registered medical practitioner, with termination of pregnancy **after 22 weeks** if advised by two registered medical practitioners. The Acts are also very clear in stating that a woman aborting her own pregnancy does not face any criminal liability.

What does this mean for Zontians in District 22?

Until we have a revised statement from Zonta International Board, the current Statement on Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health still stands. Acknowledging that we have legal frameworks on terminations of pregnancy enshrined in law in both of our States, and continuing our non-sectarian viewpoint, I believe that we can support all and each action of the adopted Resolution. ZONTA does not promote pregnancy termination above all other options for women’s

and girls' reproductive and sexual health, but we do promote access to all resources for women's reproductive and sexual health choices.

If Zonta International's revised position paper raises concern I ask that the concerned member discuss it with either the club President, Area Director or Advocacy Chair to ensure a comprehensive understanding of our stance.

Further, given that media outlets may choose to misrepresent the entire message of ZONTA's position on women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health for the media's own aims, I ask that should Zontians be approached by the media, that a Media Statement be handed to them, rather than a verbal statement. If you need a Media Statement, please contact your President who will contact me.

Thank you for your ZONTA commitment to building a better world for women and girls.

Lyn Agnew

Governor 2022-2024

Zonta International District 22 Ltd.