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20th March 2024

Deputy Collins
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 10328/24: To ask the Minister for Health the number of healthcare professionals who have exercised conscientious objection with regard the provision of terminations of pregnancy at the end of each year from 2019 to 2023, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Collins,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position on the various areas and issues you raised.

Section 22 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 provides that no medical practitioner, nurse or midwife will be obliged to carry out, or to participate in carrying out, a termination of pregnancy to which he or she has a conscientious objection. 22(1). A person who has a conscientious objection shall, as soon as possible, make such arrangements for the transfer of care of the pregnant woman concerned as may be necessary to enable the woman to avail of the termination of pregnancy concerned. 22 (3)

There is no statutory right to conscientious objection in an emergency. Emergency care must be provided by any staff present to a person undergoing a termination of pregnancy or experiencing complications following a termination of pregnancy.

There is currently no formal system in place or requirement nationally for staff to declare a conscientious objection. Data on the numbers of healthcare professionals who have a conscientious objection with regard to the provision of termination of pregnancy, is therefore not collated. Consequently, it is not possible to provide the information you have requested.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Davinia O'Donnell, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme