

Mr. Rafael Catala
Ministro de Justicia
Calle San Bernardo, 45
28071 Madrid, España

Mr. D. Alfonso Alonso Aranegui
Ministro de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad
Paseo del Prado, 18 – 20
28014 Madrid España

March 3, 2105

We represent Global Doctors for Choice (GDC), an international doctors' network active in many countries around the world. GDC is committed to the defense of human rights and to the provision of high-quality medical care grounded in science. Through medical research and advocacy for evidence-based policy, we strive to protect and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care.

We write to express our concern about the draft bill presented by the Spanish Government aimed at modifying the Spanish abortion law by requiring parental consent for all women aged 16 to 18 years, who wish to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. We fear that this bill will harm women's health.

Since 1985, Spain has made considerable progress in respecting women's reproductive health and rights, and Spanish women no longer have to fear for their health or life when they decide to terminate pregnancies. Unfortunately, the draft bill will be a step backwards. In 2014, 3,6% of all abortions in Spain were carried out on women aged 16 or 17 years old. Most informed their parents; only 12,4% of these women were unable to inform their parents because of abandonment, risk of suffering violence, parents residing outside of Spain or in prison or other compelling reasons. Hence, the proposed bill will have a disproportionate effect on young women already coping with situations of social distress, putting their physical and mental health at serious risk.

The proposed bill will seriously limit access to safe abortion for a vulnerable group of young women, even in situations that pose serious threats to their health. They may resort to unsafe abortion services, which may have serious consequences for health in the long term. As doctors, our first duty is always to our patients. We are alarmed that this draft bill would hamper young Spanish women's access to legal safe abortion services. Various international organizations, such as the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, have expressed their concern regarding the direct relationship between restrictive abortion laws, and the risk to the life, health and well-being of women.

As a global group of doctors, we advocate that physicians maintain the integrity of the profession by according first priority to patient needs and to adherence to the highest standards of evidence-based care. We call on the Spanish Government to withdraw this legislation, as it will neither promote women's health and rights, nor conform to patient's best interests.

We urge you to take all necessary steps to protect the lives and well-being of young women aged 16 and 17 years in Spain and to withdraw the draft bill.

Sincerely,



Dick van der Tak
Executive Director
Global Doctors for Choice



Jodi Magee
Chair of the Board of Managers
Global Doctors for Choice