**PCI: Secretary of State’s new powers ‘destructive’**

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has called Westminster’s confirmation of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland’s abortion powers ‘deeply regrettable’ and ‘a sad day not only for devolution’, which has been seriously undermined, ‘but also for the protection of unborn children…’ In light of Parliament’s approval, the Church has also called on the Secretary of State not use these new powers and reflect on how destructive they could be.

Speaking after today’s debate on the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021 in the House of Lords, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce said, “When the Secretary of State introduced regulations last month seeking powers to implement abortion legislation over and above the heads of MLAs, we described the move as ‘unreasonable, unacceptable, ill-considered and irresponsible’.

“We deeply regret that Parliament has now given its approval for these radical and sweeping powers, which not only devalue Northern Ireland’s purposely unique system of negotiated government, but also give the Secretary of State the freedom to interfere directly, and at will, with every single department of devolved government.

“It is difficult to reconcile the fact that during the three years when Northern Ireland didn’t have a functioning Executive, his predecessors did not find it necessary to intervene in its governance, except on budgetary matters and other minor ways. Yet now, when Ministers are in office and seeking to govern together, this radical move is now deemed to be essential.”

Dr Bruce continued, “The Secretary of State, and those supportive of devolution, cannot claim to be upholding Northern Ireland’s fragile devolved settlement, while at the same time facilitating this ill-considered and irresponsible intervention which cherry-picks issues and undermines that very system. It should not be forgotten that nearly 80% of those who responded to the public consultation on the abortion regulations in 2019 were against the proposals.

“This is a sad day not only for devolution, but also for the protection of unborn children, leaving children with Down’s syndrome and other conditions unprotected and incredibly vulnerable, not to mention those perceived to be of the ‘wrong’ gender. We call on the Secretary of State not use these new powers and reflect on how destructive they could be.”