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Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about protests at abortion clinics.

This country has a proud history of allowing free speech but the right to peaceful protest does not extend to harassment or threatening behaviour. The law already provides protection against harassment and intimidation, and the police have a range of powers to manage protests. Like all members of the public, protesters are subject to the law and suspected criminal offences must be robustly investigated and dealt with by the police.

Following concerns about the tactics of protestors outside some abortion clinics, a review was instigated by Government in 2018. This review revealed that anti-abortion demonstrations take place outside a small number of facilities. In 2017 for example, 363 hospitals and clinics in England and Wales carried out abortions. Of those, 36 hospitals and clinics experienced anti-abortion demonstrations. With this in mind, I support the Government's assessment that introducing national buffer zones would not be an appropriate response given the experiences of the majority of hospitals and clinics.

That said, while I do not want to see peaceful protest curbed, it is completely unacceptable that anyone should feel harassed or intimidated simply for exercising their legal right to healthcare advice and treatment. The decision to have an abortion is already an incredibly personal one, without women being further pressured by aggressive protesters. I am glad that the Government keeps this area under review, and I know Ministers ensure they keep up to date with any new evidence that comes to light.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY

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