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FREEDOM OF SPEECH THREATENED BY TASMANIAN BILL

“Proposed changes contained in the *Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Bill 2013* threaten freedom of speech and freedom of conscience,” said Simon Breheny, director of the Legal Rights Project at free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

The bill has passed the Tasmanian House of Assembly and is now set to be debated by the Tasmanian Legislative Council.

“The bill proposes a fine of \$65,000 or a 12 month jail term for the newly created crime of protesting in an area within a radius of 150 metres from an abortion clinic. This is an inappropriate limitation on freedom of speech.

“General laws against intimidation already exist in the law and they are appropriate restraints on unacceptable behaviour.

“Singling out particular premises for special treatment undermines equality before the law. This bill does not make it illegal to distribute material outside supermarkets or sports grounds, for instance. The Tasmanian government should not ban protests, whether they occur outside an abortion clinic or a timber mill.

“The bill also threatens freedom of conscience by forcing doctors who have a conscientious objection to abortion to refer patients to another doctor who does not have such objections. A fine of \$32,500 applies to counsellors who refuse to contradict their beliefs. This is a clear and unacceptable infringement of freedom of conscience,” said Mr Breheny.

For media and comment:

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