# MPs face historic vote to decriminalise abortion amid fierce debate



In a significant legislative moment, Members of Parliament (MPs) are poised to vote on a proposal aimed at decriminalising abortion in England and Wales. Presently, abortion services are governed by the 1967 Abortion Act, which allows pregnancy terminations up to 24 weeks under specific conditions but remains anchored in the restrictive framework of the Victorian-era Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. This ageing legislation continues to foster legal ambiguities, leading to increasing scrutiny of women suspected of undertaking illegal procedures.

The proposed amendment, championed by Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi, seeks to fundamentally shift how abortion is treated legally. It would eliminate the threat of prosecution for women terminating a pregnancy, allowing them to do so without the current legal hurdles that often require the testimony of health risks. Critically, while the framework for obtaining abortions would largely remain intact—requiring the approval of two doctors for procedures conducted in medical settings—this amendment seeks to reduce women's fear of legal repercussions should they choose to manage their reproductive health more autonomously.

The urgency for reform is underscored by alarming reports, including the case of Nicola Packer, who was acquitted after facing charges for self-administering abortion pills during the COVID-19 lockdown, unaware that she had breached the legal limits. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has voiced strong support for Antoniazzi's amendment, asserting that current laws are harmful and outmoded. Alongside the Royal College, numerous medical professionals and NGOs are backing the push for decriminalisation, which has garnered initial support from 136 MPs spanning multiple parties, including Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and even a few Conservatives.

However, the debate is not without contention. Another MP, Stella Creasy, has introduced a rival amendment which envisions decriminalising abortion up to 24 weeks while redefining it as a human right. This proposal, which has attracted 101 MPs' backing, would significantly alter existing laws, raising concerns about the potential rollback of safeguards established in the 1967 Act. Critics of Creasy’s approach, including Rachael Clarke from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), have cautioned against rushing through transformative legal changes without comprehensive discussion, suggesting that such actions could invite further societal debates about women's rights and safety in reproductive healthcare.

Polling data indicates that public opinion remains divisive; a report notes that 55% of respondents oppose the proposed decriminalisation. Detractors warn about potential unintended consequences of decriminalising abortion, with Conservative MP Miriam Cates suggesting that removing legal penalties might encourage unsafe "DIY" abortions beyond the 24-week limit, posing health risks to women.

The juxtaposition of these two amendments highlights a pivotal moment in UK reproductive rights—a debate that intertwines legal history, women's autonomy, and medical ethics. As MPs prepare for what promises to be a critical vote, the implications of these amendments could reshape the landscape of abortion access in England and Wales, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards women's rights and healthcare in a modern context. As evidence mounts that the existing legal framework may actually deter safe medical practices, the question remains whether Parliament will respond to the urgent call for change.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5v900v1y6o), [[7]](https://nation.cymru/news/moves-to-decriminalise-abortion-in-england-and-wales-could-be-revived-by-mps/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5v900v1y6o), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/08/decriminalise-abortion-in-england-and-wales-parliament-women-stella-creasy), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/08/mps-propose-decriminalising-abortion-up-to-24-weeks-england-wales-stella-creasy)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/07/abortion-decriminalise-poll-commons-vote-diana-johnson/), [[4]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/abortion-decriminalised-uk-bma-british-medical-association-doctors-act-a7810116.html), [[6]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/28/decriminalising-abortion-will-fuel-diy-warns-miriam-cates/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5v900v1y6o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/08/decriminalise-abortion-in-england-and-wales-parliament-women-stella-creasy> - In this opinion piece, MP Stella Creasy argues for the full decriminalisation of abortion in England and Wales, highlighting the outdated nature of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act and the need for modernisation to protect women's rights. She draws parallels with Northern Ireland's progressive abortion laws and warns against potential backlashes that could restrict access to abortion services.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/07/abortion-decriminalise-poll-commons-vote-diana-johnson/> - This article reports on polling data showing that 55% of the public oppose MPs' plans to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales. It discusses the proposed amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill, including one by Labour MP Diana Johnson to decriminalise abortion beyond the 24-week limit, and presents arguments from both supporters and opponents of the change.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/abortion-decriminalised-uk-bma-british-medical-association-doctors-act-a7810116.html> - The Independent reports that the British Medical Association (BMA) has voted to adopt a policy calling for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK. The article covers the debate among medical professionals, with some supporting the change to treat abortion as a medical issue rather than a criminal one, while others express concerns about potential risks and regulatory implications.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/08/mps-propose-decriminalising-abortion-up-to-24-weeks-england-wales-stella-creasy> - This article details a proposal by a cross-party group of MPs to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks in England and Wales. The MPs aim to modernise abortion laws by introducing legislation that would make access to abortion a human right, aligning with practices in other Western European countries.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/28/decriminalising-abortion-will-fuel-diy-warns-miriam-cates/> - Conservative MP Miriam Cates warns that decriminalising abortion could lead to an increase in late-term DIY procedures. She argues that removing criminal sanctions might encourage women to attempt self-administered abortions after the current 24-week limit, potentially endangering their health and safety.
7. <https://nation.cymru/news/moves-to-decriminalise-abortion-in-england-and-wales-could-be-revived-by-mps/> - Nation.Cymru reports on the potential revival of proposals to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales. Welsh Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi highlights that around 100 women have been investigated by police in the last five years for ending their own pregnancies, underscoring the need for legal reform.