

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

5th March 2021

Dear Constance,

RE: FOETAL PAIN – EARLY DAY MOTION 1340

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of foetal sentience, with specific reference to Early Day Motion (EDM) 1340; your comments upon which I have read with great interest and compassion.

I completely understand what an incredibly emotive issue this is, and I appreciate the strength of feelings on all sides. It is for this reason that, as with other matters of conscience, the Government rightly adopts a neutral stance on abortion, allowing Conservative MPs to vote freely according to their moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. This is a convention which I support wholeheartedly.

I understand that, in the last ten years, the body of knowledge relating to foetal sentience has been expanding, such that in 2019 the NHS recommended pain relief for foetuses undergoing surgery for spina bifida from 20 weeks onwards. I also know that the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists has not recommended the use of analgesia or anaesthesia for the foetus in utero, including for abortions. There is a wide range of guidance and research in this area, reaching a wide range of recommendations and conclusions, and I will of course work to ensure that government and NHS guidance responds to the latest scientific information.

I believe it is vital that, on a matter this sensitive and important, the broadest possible scope of scientific research is examined, informing a comprehensive debate. I would encourage all my colleagues across the House and on all sides of the discussion to engage in this debate.

Regarding EDM 1340 on this sensitive issue, notwithstanding the fact that as a Government Minister I am unable to sign EDMs, in any event, I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs. With that in mind, I have relayed your concerns to my ministerial colleagues.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you, then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes
Tom

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE