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Bishop of Aberdeen  
Rt Rev Rueb Gilbert O.S.B.

The First Minister  
The Scottish Government,  
St Andrew's House,  
Regent Rd.,  
Edinburgh EH 1 3DG

17<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

Dear First Minister,

I write following recent public comments made by Dr Lisa Cameron, SNP Member of Parliament for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow:

On Tuesday 9 July, Dr Cameron voted against an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill that would have lifted the legal protections presently afforded to the unborn child in Northern Ireland. It is a long-standing parliamentary convention that votes on such ethical issues are considered matters of conscience and, thus, are not subject to the party whip. Indeed, this was confirmed in writing to Dr Cameron prior to the 9 July vote by the SNP Chief Whip, Patrick Grady MP.

In the days following the vote, however, Dr Cameron has been subject to a significant degree of hostility from many quarters, including ordinary members and officer bearers of the Scottish National Party, some of which she describes as being "nothing less than vitriolic" in nature. She adds that according to local officials it may "now be incompatible to hold pro-life views and be a SNP MP, candidate, to pass vetting or be elected in any capacity". She further notes that, despite prompting, she has presently received no public re-assurance from the leadership of the SNP that this is not, in fact, the case. I therefore am writing to you as Leader of the Scottish National Party to seek such a public re-assurance.

I believe I write on behalf of all who cherish freedom of conscience within the public square and hold in high regard those in public life who remain true to their conscience, even at the expense of personal popularity or political advantage.

"Moral courage is readiness to expose oneself to suffering or inconvenience which does not affect the body," wrote the co-founder of the Scottish National Party, Sir Compton Mackenzie, in 1962, "It arises from firmness of moral principle and is independent of the physical constitution."

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, First Minister.

I await your reply with anticipation. In the meantime, please be assured of my continued prayers and good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh Gilbert,  
Rt Rev Hugh Gilbert O.S.B.  
Bishop of Aberdeen

President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland