

As a family we oppose the proposed 'Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019' that would require mandatory reporting by a priest of the knowledge of sexual abuse gained in the context of the Sacrament of Penance. We hold this opposition for many religious and even practical reasons. These reasons were clearly outlined and explained by the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, his grace the most reverend Timothy Costelloe SDB in his Pastoral Letter dated 18.05.2020.

Not being ourselves survivors of sexual abuse it is difficult for us to attest to the healing power of this Sacrament as it pertains to this particularly grievous wound. However, the total confidentiality in this Sacrament has many times given us the courage to admit our own brokenness, thereby enabling each of us to persevere along the path of reforming our own lives and rooting out those tendencies and behaviours that are to our personal and communal detriment. Many abuse survivors seem to share these same sentiments, remarking that a significant aid to their journey to full healing was the confidentiality of the Sacrament of Penance. While they themselves were not guilty and bear no responsibility for the crime inflicted upon them, the secrecy of the Confessional provided a place for them to pour out their distress and so take their first steps towards healing. To break this secrecy would drive many distressed survivors of sexual abuse away from, what is for some, their last hope. As it stands, the proposed amendment would drag the already distressed victim into the public light in order to apprehend the perpetrators. This does seem like a logical course of action, however if undertaken, it would further injure and bring undue stress and pain.

Furthermore, it appears highly unlikely that a perpetrator would enter the confessional, confess to the crime of sexual abuse and then also provide the priest with the necessary information so as to be reported. This is so particularly if this legislation is approved.

These are but two aspects of the Sacrament of Penance that would be threatened with the proposed amendment. The Catholic Archbishop of Perth, as previously noted, has expounded in much greater detail these, and many other issues. While our own points (ones that the Archbishop also discusses) are closest to our hearts, we support and take as our own the comments of the Archbishop in his Pastoral Letter.

We make this submission in good faith, trusting the assigned Committee to take our concerns seriously and to respect the Catholic Church's theology and long-standing traditions, particularly in regard to the Sacrament of Penance.