

Dear Legislation Committee,

This letter is in reference to the Seal of Confessional as mentioned in the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019 and the free practice of religion here in Western Australia. I have concerns about the proposed government bill as it presently stands before Parliament. These are as follows:

- Now that the government has announced it's intention to legally require Catholic Priests to report any information about alleged abuse of children, that they come across during the Confession, would any persons who are guilty of these acts, dare to actually mention this to a Priest during Confession ? I would think they would not even come within "cooee" of a church, let alone enter a confessional. Therefore, a huge opportunity has now been lost, to carry out any intervention / counselling / advice to turn themselves in to the authorities, if the perpetrators are not even going to see / meet a Priest.
- To this lost opportunity for intervention, is added the prospect of victims of (child) sexual abuse too scared to come forward to tell their stories / seek help because of the expected loss of privacy / confidentiality because of this (proposed) legislated mandatory reporting – Double Whammy !
- In adopting the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law* (National Law) in 2010, the Western Australian Parliament amended it to include an additional category of exemption from the requirement for mandatory notification of a fellow health practitioner /student where "the first health practitioner forms the reasonable belief" as to the notifiable conduct/impairment "in the course of providing health services to the second health practitioner or student". Speaking from the point of view as a Medical Practitioner, myself, I would say that we (WA doctors) are the envy of our colleagues in the other states. Doctors who are unwell can attend their treating doctor without the stumbling block of mandatory reporting. By analogy, I feel that we in WA should not frighten-off people who are seeking help from the Confessional Priest (be it the perpetrators or the victims) . (I refer to the article: *Journal of Law & Medicine* (2014); **22**: 209. (see link below to article)

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There are many other points that I would like to make but it would take far too long to read. I trust that you will give consideration to the points I have made above and thank you for your role in ensuring that the best laws rule our state.

Yours sincerely,