

Legislative Council Legislation Committee  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Terrace  
West Perth, 6005

To whom it may concern,

I am a Catholic priest and I would like to submit my thoughts about the proposed bill to remove the seal of confession by making Catholic priests mediatory reporters of child abuse.

I understand there is an important need to protect the vulnerable, however I don't believe removing the seal of confession is the best way to do this. The Sacrament of Confession is a tool to help prevent abuse to ourselves or others (which we call sin) from occurring. Confession is also called reconciliation, which highlights the fact that this Sacrament gives a person the chance to overcome sin in his or her life which helps prevent further harm. Confession is also called Penance which means a person is called to make amends for the evil he or she does.

The seal of Confession, in which a priest cannot reveal what he hears in confession, safeguards this very important Sacrament by giving people the freedom to be completely honest without fear of prosecution. Without the safeguard of the seal of Confession people would simply stop coming to Confession, which would hinder a person from receiving the help he or she needs to change their lives. In regards to a person who is abused, the seal of Confession helps them to come forward and talk about the abuse without fear. This too can bring healing to their lives and they can be encouraged to seek professional help.

Of course, if a person confesses abuse, which in my experience is extremely rare, the priest can do everything in his power to convince the person to seek professional help, which may include going to the authorities. However, imposing priests to be mandatory reporters will simply cause the problem of abuse to go underground, which in my belief will cause abuse to continue.

Since the Royal Commission into child abuse the Church has put many safeguarding practices in place to help prevent abuse. It is my firm belief that Confession (including the seal) is an important aspect of the safeguarding plan to help prevent abuse. Confession helps prevent abuse by showing abusers the grave sin they are committing and the need for justice. In addition to this, Confession helps bring healing to those who have experienced abuse by allowing them to talk about the abuse in a safe environment.

Regards  
Fr. Mark Payton  
Parish Priest of the Sacred Heart Parish, Highgate.