

Dear Legislation Committee,

This letter is in reference to the Seal of Confession as mentioned in the "Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019"

The proposed Bill in its current form will have widespread negative ramifications firstly for me personally, and secondly for the broader community. The proposed Bill if accepted and implemented will alter and hence deny for me and for many others the private and confidential space to talk about and or confess subjects of an extremely private and intimate nature.

As you may be aware Catholic Priests are not permitted by the Church (under Canon Law 959-997) to break the Seal of Confession, no matter what any civil law may say. So this potential change will place the Priests in an extremely difficult situation, which would be very unjust. It is widely known that paedophiles rarely if ever confess their sins to Priests. This is because they rarely if ever experience feelings of guilt and the need to confess.

Moreover, to thus coerce faithful Catholic Priests in WA to deny their conscience and their freedom to practice their faith also contravenes The Australian Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief Constitution, section 116, 4.2. The Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin that has the effect of nullifying or impairing quality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation. This Bill would therefore nullify, impair and deny the intrinsic core values of Catholic Priests in their occupation as Spiritual Fathers and Good Shepherds, by compelling disclosure of confidential and private Confessions.

Anti-discrimination laws are defined as: *..allowing Australians to practice religion without fear of consequence.*

In conclusion, I appreciate in theory what is a seemingly a well-intentioned Bill, but there will in fact be catastrophic ramifications for the Catholic Church and society in WA if this Bill were to be passed.

Yours faithfully,

 John Rullo,