

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019**

My name is Kevin Long, and I am the parish priest of St Joseph's Catholic Church Subiaco. I hold a PhD from UWA.

I have heard confessions for over 39 years. No one has ever confessed the crime of child abuse to me.

The desire of the WA Government to ensure the safety of children should be the desire of all right thinking citizens.

The question of the seal of confession, however, risks a secular government entering into a centuries old and intimate religious experience of many Catholic, Orthodox and Anglicans citizens of WA.

Changing the rules concerning the Seal of Confession will not achieve the laudable desire of the Government to protect children.

I am sure your Committee intends to examine the authorised liturgical rites used by the Catholic Church when providing sacramental confession in WA. These would be available from the Office of the Catholic Archbishop of Perth.

An examination of these liturgical rites will remove what seems to be a common misunderstanding as to how Catholics make their Confession.

The popular understanding that the priest can easily identify the penitent is simply wrong. Here in Subiaco, Confessions are made in the Confessional 'Box' which protects the anonymity of the person making the Confession. The penitent is in an enclosed space. The priest is in another enclosed space. One cannot enter each other's space. A wooden wall and wire grill separate both spaces.

No Catholic who seeks Confession identifies themselves. They are not required to do so.

No names or contact details are given by the penitent to the priest.

Even if someone confessed the crime of child abuse, the priest hearing the Confession would not know the name of the penitent or know how to contact the penitent.

Any legislation concerning the seal of Confession would be impossible to enforce.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Monsignor Kevin Long PhD (UWA)

22 July 2020