

Boon Liang Quah

Dear Legislation Committee,

Subject: Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019

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

The main reason I have been led to write to you today is the following:

The breaking of the Confessional Seal is a change that is not open to the Australian Catholic Church to make. The Holy See in Rome has that authority. The Royal Commission's Recommendation 16.26 has not been adequately explored.

- The Royal Commission recommended / suggested that the Australian Catholic Church seeks clarification from the Vatican / the Holy See on "whether information received from a child during the sacrament of reconciliation that they had been sexually abused would be covered by the seal of confession"; and "whether absolution could and should be withheld if a person confessed to perpetrating child sexual abuse, until they report themselves to civil authorities".
- The Catholic Church in Australia, and any part thereof, has no power to change the Seal of Confession. This can only be done with a directive from the Vatican.
- The Royal Commission's Recommendation (in Volume 16 of the Final Report) 16.26 has not been adequately / sufficiently explored. Changes to law should not occur until this has been done.

Existing and Other Possible Measures to Safeguard Children.

- The Catholic Church in Australia has implemented 79 of the 80 recommendations put forward in the Royal Commission's Final Report, except for / bar the recommendation relating to breaking the Seal of Confession, which the bishops cannot change or rule on. This is a decision for the Holy See / the Vatican to make.
- The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth has implemented exemplary measures in the safeguarding of children.
- The Archdiocese of Perth has successfully rolled out a Safeguarding Programme that has been adopted as a model across Catholic dioceses throughout Australia.
- No other organisation outside the Catholic Church of Australia has a similar or as large-scale a programme for the safeguarding of children as exists in Western Australia.
- Rather than force the Church to implement mandatory reporting, which is beyond its power to do, the Government should instead consult and work collaboratively with the Church to implement and improve practices that are within the Church's power to implement.

Thank you for your role in ensuring that the best laws rule our State.

Yours Faithfully,

Mr Boon Liang Quah