

Thank you for letting me voice my concerns about the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019.

There are several areas where I believe the bill is weak and in places impossible to enact which gives me grave concern as a Western Australian.

Here are the areas which I have been mulling over and considering.

- It is victims and not abusers who use confession in traditional churches. I have heard a number of victims stories and want them to increase in their healing, not to decrease in it. As for abusers, they are unlikely if ever to confess crimes in any confessional setting. If they did then this would be a good thing and would give a very rare opportunity to actually reform the offenders.

- I believe it to be common knowledge that breaking the confessional seal is not something the Australian Catholic bishops can orchestrate alone however much the government demand this. This can only be done by the Vatican. The Royal Commission's Recommendation 16.26 seems not to have been addressed. If not, then why not?

- Only the last group of five groups recommended by the Royal Commission is mentioned in the Amendment Bill and the Minister has indicated that there has been any consultation with major stakeholders of the religious ministers' group. What about the other four groups? These include people who deal with the youngest and therefore most vulnerable of children. Shouldn't the care and protection of these minors be uppermost in the Minister's mind and proposed legislation?

- The Catholic Church in Western Australia has done remarkable work to bring the safeguarding of children to everyone's attention. It would have been better if the government had first undergone discussions with victims and the churches before trying to push through legislation.

- To demand that all Catholic and Orthodox priests be mandatory reporters puts them into an impossible situation. Such a demand not only contravenes the priest's but also the penitent's free practice of religion which is a universally recognised human right (see Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

Please can you give careful consideration to each one of these points.