

Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019

22 July 2020

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you in regards to this inquiry as a mother of young children and as a member of the Catholic Church. While on the surface this Bill looks like the government is doing something to combat the scourge of sexual abuse, my concern is that in reality this law will see less perpetrators brought to justice, less survivors of abuse brought to healing and an innocent portion of the community unfairly infringed upon.

By introducing mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse for priests, including information disclosed during Confession, we remove the last free, safe, community space where survivors of abuse can reveal their trauma with confidence. As they begin to heal, survivors may find the courage to take this matter to the police but by removing this first vital step in the process, some perpetrators will never be brought to justice. Additionally, although it is known to be rare for abusers themselves to confess these sins, by removing the seal of Confession, you effectively ask the victims and perpetrators of these crimes to walk directly into a police station and confess the matter. Isn't it preferable to have a safe place where healing and justice can begin rather than to stop this process altogether?

Why are the Catholic and Orthodox Churches being singled out in this law? The Catholic Church in Perth has implemented exemplary measures in the safeguarding of children. Why does this law not encompass psychologists and school counsellors? Has there been significant consultation with survivor groups to ensure these laws achieve their aims?

The Roman Catholic Church is a universal Church that has stood the test of time. This law asks Catholic priests to violate the law of the Catholic Church thus causing them to be automatically dismissed from their Office. It seems this law will unfairly impact innocent priests and deter victims from seeking healing while achieving nothing in regards to rendering justice to the perpetrators of these heinous crimes.

Regards,

Ngaire Kiernan