

SUBMISSION TO ENQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL 2019.

My Submission addresses the amendments to the Children and Community Services Act 2004 – specifically:

Section 124BA. Provisions for ministers of religion.

I am grateful to Julia Gillard for calling the Royal Commission, commend the successive federal governments for funding the extended enquiry and applaud, thank all trustworthy victims who spoke up, and am grateful to all who contributed and who in any way are endeavouring to ensure that Australian children are safe in institutions.

I want all children to be safe, and thus support government efforts to ensure safety for Australian children in all places they frequent and dwell in.

However, as a practicing Catholic I am deeply concerned that mandatory reporting impacts most on the practice of the Confessional Seal in Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Confession is not a game. It is an honest attempt to face the truth about ourselves and do something about it.

It is not covering up the truth, but facing the truth. It is not an attempt to feel better or to fool ourselves. It is a healing sacrament. Countless times I have left the confessional with a weight lifted from me, often carrying in my mind words of counselling from the priest regarding steps I can take not to do that sin again.

While my sins arguably are not things which directly endanger children or even break the law, the rationale is the same. Any priest worth his salt who hears confessions of abuse would not only strongly encourage the confessing offender to hand himself in, but would, in accordance to Catholic teaching and to the very foundational teaching of Christ himself, withhold absolution and God's forgiveness until the person is genuinely sorry and is determined to take appropriate action – ie, hand himself in so due process can be made, and, if he's sent to prison, that would be IN KEEPING WITH CATHOLIC TEACHING on atoning for one's sins, and protecting the welfare of others, because after all, everyone is made in God's own image.

Neither is Confession an attempt to look good in the eyes of the priest. Confession is a genuine revealing of soul, a genuine opening up of the raw material of our life to God, via the priest; to get an objective assessment of our self if we are judging yourself too harshly; to get resolution if we are too weak or too ready to excuse ourself; to get help if we are unsure; to get advice and support if we are in doubt; to find peace in hearing those consoling words: "You are forgiven" and to truly believe we are forgiven - if we had difficulty believing that we could be forgiven, even for lesser faults like an unruly tongue.

We have full confidence in the healing effects of this sacrament because of the SEAL OF CONFESSION.

I'm sure the people considering this legislative change has heard and seen submissions suggesting many survivors currently use the Confession as a safe space for counseling, support and healing. The Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches and survivor groups have all not been contacted during the consulted on process. The grossly inadequate consultation with key stakeholders will have serious unintended consequences.

Kind regards