

We share four major concerns about this bill, which we wish to bring to your attention.

1. It is clear that the Catholic Church, especially in Western Australia, has done more work than any other organisation to pay attention to safeguarding children. We are wondering why the Government didn't first consult with key people who are affected by this bill, namely abuse survivors and the traditional churches. This should have been done before trying to pass legislation.

2. Victims and survivors are the only people linked with child sexual abuse who use the confessional, and they use it for healing and justice. We have learnt this firsthand, and have heard these stories. Abusers don't use the confessional and if they did then this would be an amazing opportunity to get them to start the journey of their own reformation. Above all, we want to see those who are broken increase their welfare, not decrease it.

3. The Confessional Seal can't be changed by the Australian Catholic Bishops. Only the Vatican can do this which is what the Royal Commission's Recommendation 16.26 said should happen in the first place. Why didn't this happen? Why are priests and bishops, and victims who use confession, the people who are now being hassled and policed for the content of the confessional? Whatever happened to people's freedom of religious practice?

4. What concerns us both the most is that the bill only mentions and deals with one of five groups recommended by the Royal Commission and there has been no consultation with any minister of religion. What about the other four groups, especially early childhood workers, who work daily with WA's most vulnerable children? The Royal Commission has stated that these are the most vulnerable group of all – and yet they are still not covered by mandatory reporting. This surely is the most urgent group to address.

Thank you for taking the time to let us express our concerns.