

In the Catholic tradition, it really needs to be appreciated that when a person comes for Confession, they are doing so not because of the person of the priest but who the priest is acting in the name of, namely, God. It is unlike other situations where a person approaches a doctor, psychologist, teacher etc because of their own professional expertise, experience or professionalism. In Confession, the priest is approached only because the priest has received the faculty to forgive sins for someone who is repentant and asks for God's forgiveness.

A priest may possess some personal skills in counselling or a special sensitivity but, even if these be lacking, a priest will still be approached in Confession because of their faculty to forgive sins. A priest (or even the same priest) may be approached for the same personal reasons outside of Confession where these skills and characteristics can be also useful and, because the priest is approached more for reasons of their person rather than a faculty received from God, the dynamic is different – the priest is acting as any other person in counselling but, in Confession, it's in the person of Christ.

It's for this reason, if information regarding sexual abuse is obtained outside of Confession, any priest would have no problems disclosing it to the proper authorities. If it is obtained in Confession, it is information disclosed not intended primarily for the priest, but for God. The priest does hear what is disclosed to God but the person is not sharing this information to the priest primarily but to God.

It's for this reason, it's always been regarded as sacred the right of the person to have this conversation kept absolutely confidential. There have been precedents in history of priests who have paid the ultimate sacrifice to maintain the confidentiality of what was disclosed in Confession and it's a sacrifice many (if not, all) priests are willing to make; hopefully it won't ever have to come to that again in history.

In practice (even in our own time), a significant number of people who do come for Confession prefer to do so anonymously (appearing behind a screen where they are not visible – though audible – to the priest). This is also a right that people have when they come for Confession. It's not important for the priest to know the identity of the person confessing but at least that they are repentant and this is expressed audibly. It's another example of how one comes to Confession not primarily to who the priest is but who the priest represents and acts in the name of, namely, God.

In terms of the sincerity of a person's repentance, there would hardly be a priest who would not take the opportunity to advise a person admitting to sexual abuse (or any other crime, for that matter) to hand themselves over to the proper authorities.

In more practical terms, as probably mentioned in a number of other submissions, perpetrators can often be psychologically unaware that their actions are wrong. However, in the anecdotally rare instance they do come to Confession in order to ask for God's forgiveness, it would often be a last opportunity where they could be strongly encouraged (even continuously) of the importance, necessity and gravity of handing themselves to justice.

I strongly urge you to consider not supporting this amendment because it demonstrates a lack of regard for what Confession is in the Catholic tradition, a lack of understanding of the practicalities of how it takes place and a lack of appreciation that the role of confidentiality that comes with it can possibly help steer perpetrators to do the right thing.