

SUBMISSION : Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse.

REF: Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019

We the undersigned believe the proposed amendments ie, clauses 51 to 53 of the Amendment Bill 2019 in question, and the two recommendations 7.3 and 7.4 as contained in the final report of the Royal Commission are of concern to us. These amendments are going to affect Ministers of religion and in addition, it affects the faithful of the freedom to practice ones religion. This in turn will affect our future generations in the practices of our faith.

With reference to recommendation 7.3, we do agree and support to mandatory reporting to Child Protection Authorities. Any form of abuse of any kind is totally unacceptable and we do not condone such acts. However we are at odds to understand why people in religious ministry have been targeted and unfairly singled out and not being offered consultation as has been afforded to the other four groups :

- 1) Out-of-Care workers.
- 2) Youth Justice workers.
- 3) Early Childhood workers.
- 4) Registered Psychologists and School Counsellors.

Hence the selection of only the Minister of Religion seems to be discriminated.

With reference to recommendation 7.4, we do not support mandatory reporting on what is disclosed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This clearly seems to be very discriminative and anti-Catholic. We further refute the accusation that the Church and the Seal of Confession (SOC) are impediments to the reporting of Child Sexual Abuse.

The Seal of Confession is sacred and a very integral part of our Catholic faith. For an abused child/person, a Catholic priest is sometimes their only channel of help. Each priest realises that he is the ordained mediator of a very sacred and precious sacrament. He knows that in the confessional, the penitent speaks not so much to him, but through him to the Lord. Therefore, humbled by his position the priests knows that whatever is said in confession must remain secret at all costs. The sacramental seal is inviolable. Quoting Canon 983.1 of the Code of Canon Law, the Catechism states, "... it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason" (No 2490). If the priest violates the SOC, he incurs an automatic excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See as per the Catechism (No 1467) of the Code of Canon Law (No 1388.1). From the severity of the punishment, we can clearly see how sacred SOC is in the eyes of the Church.

By breaking the SOC, our religious practices will be undermined and the rights and vocation of the Priesthood will be violated. This proposed bill in its raw form attacks the very core of Catholic beliefs and practices.

Under the stewardship of Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, much has been done over the last few years in WA to address legitimate concerns about issues of safety and wellbeing of children and the young. The Archdiocese of Perth under the leadership of Archbishop Costelloe was the first of Australia's Catholic dioceses to begin establishing Safeguarding Officers across its network of parishes and this initiative is being exercised in all Catholic churches throughout Australia. All parishes in WA have mandatory "Working with Children Cards" required for all involved in volunteer activities in the church and men entering the seminary have to undergo strict screening processes among other things.

We believe that as citizens of this Democratic country, we have the liberty and Constitutional Right to practice our religion without interference from the State.

In conclusion, we hope politicians and all those in leadership roles be prudent in using their authority in their decision-making to uphold the freedom and Democratic values Australia has enjoyed over all these years.

Hence, we believe that recommendation 7.4 should not be passed.

Quote : Catholic Prayer Bible

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Yours faithfully