

I am thankful for the opportunity to share my concerns with you today about this bill.

I have a friend who is a survivor of child sexual abuse and he regularly uses the confessional as a safe and secure place where he, like others, can share the intimate details of his life. He has shared with me how he has often made reference to his past abuse so as to help the priest understand fully the challenges and predicaments that he encounters in life. It is clear that this is a healing environment for him, one which I would not wish to see taken away from him or from any other victim of childhood sexual abuse.

I cannot imagine abusers using the confession to speak about their crimes. The notorious child abusing "priest", Gerald Ridsdale, publicly stated that he never ever, in years of abusing children, made mention of his horrendous behaviour in the confessional setting. If he is unlikely to do this, then why should others? Anyway, by mentioning that the confessional is likely to be policed, or should this law be passed, no perpetrator will now go anywhere near to the confessional, so the opportunity to reform even one abuser – should they visit the confessional – has now been removed.

It appears to me that only the most vulnerable will pay the price should the confessional be policed in any way.

Over the centuries that the seal of confession has been in place, any act of repentance within the confession takes place not on the natural realm but on the celestial realm, something that so few people now understand today, which is possibly why we have such an increase in crime as people no longer have a moral compass, something which no politician can create laws for to bring about.