

Dear members of the committee,

Firstly, being a parent, I would like to thank you for prioritising the safety of children in this state of ours.

Secondly, I do not believe that this Amendment Bill is of any value in achieving the objective of protecting vulnerable children from harm. In fact, I believe it will actually be putting these vulnerable children in more harm than they currently potentially face. I am sure everyone involved has good intentions, but I believe this Amendment Bill is counterintuitive as a solution to the objective of protecting the lives of vulnerable children. I will demonstrate this in the following manner:

1. Highlighting the fact that if this Amendment Bill is passed then all vulnerable children who are Catholic will not be able to practice their faith.
2. Highlighting the fact that there is a large body of medical research which suggests that practicing your faith, in particular the Catholic faith, can reduce the risk of depression, lower the risk of suicide, diminish drug abuse, and aid in recovery.

1. Vulnerable children who are Catholic will no longer be able to practice their faith.

To practice Catholicism in a way that aligns with our freedom to practice religion in this country, it is necessary that there be a priest available to provide the sacraments. As Catholics we hold that the soul is immortal, and that it is of vital importance to care for the state of the soul, to ensure we have the best possible chance to - God willing - get to heaven. The sacrament of Confession is essential in achieving this goal of caring for the state of our souls. For the sacrament of Confession to be licit and valid, a priest is required. As the Archbishop has already pointed out in his pastoral letter dated 18th May 2020; by asking Catholic priests to break the seal of Confession, you are asking them to remove themselves from Catholic Church and they would not be able to function as a priest. "Furthermore, if I were to make such a statement and any priest in the archdiocese were subsequently to act on it by revealing what he had learned during the course of a Confession, that priest would be automatically excommunicated and unable to function as a priest." Thus if this Amendment Bill became law, you would essentially be removing the ability - one priest at a time - for Catholics to practice their faith.

2. There is a large body of medical research which suggests that practicing your faith, in particular the Catholic faith, can reduce the risk of depression, lower the risk of suicide, diminish drug abuse, and aid in recovery.

"To cite just one finding from among a growing body of medical research on this subject, Tyler VanderWeele of Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health recently published a study of suicide and religious participation among women in the U.S. Against the grim backdrop of increasing suicide rates, this study of 89,000 participants found that some groups remain protected from the rising tide of despair and self-harm. Between 1996 and 2010, those who attended any religious service once a week or more were five times less likely to commit suicide. Those who identified as either Catholic or Protestant had a suicide rate about half that of U.S. women in general. Of the 6,999 Catholic women who said they attended Mass more than once a week, none committed suicide. Religious practice turned out to be more important than mere affiliation; self-identified Catholics who did not attend Mass had suicide rates comparable to those of other women who were not active worshippers." - <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/08/dying-of-despair>

In conclusion, I do not think this Amendment Bill has any practical value in its application. The two points highlighted above are only a few of many reasons why removing the seal of Confession is a nonsensical idea.

May God bless you all.