

The Legislative Committee
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

By email: lclc@parliament.wa.gov.au

23 July 2020

**SEAL OF CONFESSION SUBMISSION
TO THE WESTERN AUSTRALIA GOVERNMENT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
ON THE PROPOSED *CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL 2019* WHICH
PROPOSES TO AMEND *THE CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES ACT 2004***

My name is Ederlyn Patterson and I am a constituent in the Electorate of Riverton. I am an active voter in both Federal and State campaigns. I am also a devout Catholic and belong to the parish of Saints John and Paul, Catholic Church in Willetton. My ministry in the Church includes the following:-

- Special Eucharistic Minister;
- Personal Advocacy - Inclusion;
- John Paul Care;
- RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- Marriage Preparation Encounter;

I make this submission on my own behalf based on my beliefs, knowledge and values.

Firstly, I want to deeply express that I share with you the desire of our State Government in Western Australia in making policies in favour of keeping children in this State as safe as possible. However, I do disagree on a fundamental point that impacts on my Catholic faith with respect to the proposed amendments to Clauses 51 to 53 of the ***Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019*** for the following reasons:-

The sacrament of reconciliation ("confession") is a necessity for me and for any Catholic faithful. It is one of seven holy sacrament which we believe, as devout Catholics were instituted by Jesus Christ himself.

It is an integral part of the profession of our Catholic faith. It is an acknowledgement of what we have done wrong to God and/or to others in this world seeking forgiveness, grace and peace.

We confess our sins to a priest as Christ delegated his power to other men so that the Church would be able to offer forgiveness to future generations. He gave this as a communicable power to the apostles so that it could be passed on to their successors, the bishops.¹

Our religious confessions to priests are confidential and to remove the protection of this confidentiality within our Catholic church faith in confession creates division within our religious freedom and the State government in many different areas.

For example, when an individual makes religious confession to a priest, it is most likely that the priest will not know who that person is or know their personal details of the individual such as their name and/or contact details. Confessions are often anonymous. Therefore, it would be difficult for any priest to relay and/or report a confession as proposed under clause 53 and failure to do so would result to be punishable by law. Doing so will cause more damage than good to the Catholic community, our faith and society at large.

It would also be unjust to both the priest and the individual making the confession. A priest is not there to investigate or ask questions relating to sins confessed. It is a moment of being able to disclose our deepest and most sorrowful sins without judgment.

In my humble opinion, it would be unfair for a priest to report on a matter which he does not have the full information and will result in a higher risk of false allegation/s and a greater possibility in accusing and obtaining false conviction on an innocent person if such amendment is passed.

There would be other resources better utilised for such forum that would be beneficial for the individual to confess to, for example, to the Police.

The act of confession for an individual is sacred and is with a contrite heart seeking for repentance and a desire to change.

Clearly, the State and Church laws both each have their roles in society. However, the functions and traditions of our Catholic faith, I strongly request for the State to allow the fundamental trust in disclosing our sins to a priest and not to be broken. In addition, under the current code of the Canon Law, any priest who breaks the seal of confession will be excommunicated.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank you for your consideration to understand the importance of my Catholic faith in preserving the seal of confession.

Yours in Christ,

Ederlyn¹ Patterson

¹ <https://www.sfacatholic.net/why-do-catholics-confess-their-sins-to-a-priest.html>