

Submission to the Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
PERTH WA 6005

Royal Commission into Institutional responses into Child sexual Abuse
Re: Recommendation 7.3 and Recommendation 7.4

Since the findings and report of the Royal Commission in 2017 the Catholic Church of Australia has accepted 98% of its recommendations. The Archdiocese of Perth has taken extensive steps to acknowledge its failure in the past and put in place policies and procedures to ensure safety of children and young people.

Although I fully support mandatory reporting to child protection authorities of offences based on factual evidence, I fail to understand why "all ministers of religion" and the "confessional" have been singled out while the other four groups have been offered consultation. These groups have by far more frequent contacts with children and young people. Isn't the safety of all children paramount?

I am very concerned about Recommendation 7.4 of the Royal Commission that makes mandatory reporting on what is disclosed in the 'Sacrament of Reconciliation'. Using legislation to break the seal of confession will not achieve an equitable outcome for the victims of abuse while creating a new class of potential criminals whose only crime is following their conscience and practicing an important aspect of religion.

The amendment to section 124AB becomes an impediment for victims of abuse to find solace and comfort in the Sacrament of Reconciliation while some will not go to a priest when they know they have serious sin. In most cases the priest does not know the identity of the penitent when there is a physical screen between them. The end result will be that abuse which might have been stopped will instead continue.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Wong