



WESTERN AUSTRALIA PARTY

# CHARLES SMITH MLC

## MEMBER FOR EAST METRO

*Putting Western Australians First*

Dear friends,

### RE THE CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL 2019

I am writing to you as your East Metropolitan Region representative in the Western Australian Parliament.

It is imperative that I advise you of a new Bill working its way through the Parliament. This Bill is called the *Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019* and it will significantly affect the ability of Catholics within Western Australia to practice their religion.

As a former child protection police officer I commend any efforts by our Government to improve the safety and welfare of children, however I do not support what I perceive to be a covert attack on the Catholic Church.

Contained within Bill is the requirement for 'Ministers of Religion' to be compelled by law to violate the Seal of Confession and report to authorities any occasions when historical or current allegations of child sexual abuse is suspected. The Minister for Child Protection, Simone McGurk MLA with support of the West Australian Labor Party government have decided to criminalise the confidentiality of the Sacrament of Confession.

The consequences for a Priest who breaks the Seal of Confession is excommunication. An excommunicated Priest no longer has any ecclesiastical or spiritual authority to administer any of the Catholic Sacraments. The Catholic religion cannot exist without the priesthood as the priesthood is required for the Catholic Sacraments. Enemies of the Catholic Church may take advantage of this potential new law to entrap or frame Catholic priests.

Under cross examination in a court of law, a faithful Catholic Priest will not answer questions about the content of discussions within the Sacrament of Confession, making him in contempt of court with a possible gaol sentence. Should a Catholic Priest choose to disclose information about content discussed within the Sacrament of Confession, he will be excommunicated and will no longer be a Priest. Either way, the laity have lost one of their Shepherds.

Disappointingly the major parties in our state will not defend your freedom to practice your 2,000-year-old religion. This Bill will criminalise the absolute confidentiality of the Sacrament of Confession. The potential consequences of such a legal weapon are very grave. This proposed Bill, employing the simplistic message that children's safety prioritises institutional customs, provides a new avenue for enemies of the Catholic Church to attack Christianity by taking priests out of action.

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I will therefore be introducing an amendment to Parliament to make sure the Sacrament of Confession remains intact, however without major party support I fear the worst.

According to the latest census data published on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website, 25% of Catholics within the entire State of Western Australia live in my electorate (2006 - total of 530,361 Catholics in WA and 134,241 Catholics in the East Metro Region). Whilst most of these Catholics are not attending Mass weekly, almost all of them will be desiring the Catholic Sacraments, such as the Last Rites, at death's door.

It is for the sake of defending the freedom of the Catholic laity in my electorate to practice their religion that I will not support the Child Services Bill unless special exemptions are made for the Sacrament of Confession.

It is my aim, with this letter, to explain to all of you the reasoning behind my decision. I also extend an invitation to all of you to contact me if you would like to discuss elements of this Bill, your freedom to practice your religion, political policy or any other matters which affect you as citizens of the East Metropolitan Region.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a long, horizontal blue line that extends across the width of the signature.