

RE: **Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offence Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019**

Dear Members of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the proposed changes to the above Bill. It is certainly a worthy endeavour to protect the lives, safety and innocence of children.

1 The proposed new offence of 'failure to report **belief** of child sexual offence' is discriminatory, especially in relation to Catholic priests. I object to this change on two grounds. Firstly, it is discrimination against priests, as there are others who would know such information and should also be required under this legislation to 'report belief of child sexual offence'. I refer to lawyers, doctors, psychiatrists, school teachers, counsellors, etc, who, in the name of equity, should not be excused if this legislation were to be passed.

Secondly, through the use of this proposed legislation, an uncorroborated allegation by an unscrupulous person against an innocent priest could ruin his life, good reputation and freedom, with no consequences for the false accuser.

2 The second point should also be extended. 'Failure to protect a child from child sexual offence' in an **institutional context** should include the domestic context. It is well documented that most abuses occur in the home. If the proposed law is to achieve its stated purpose of protecting children, it must include what happens in a domestic context. Otherwise, it is just virtue-signalling. All parents, but particularly mothers, are responsible for the safety and care of their children, and should be subject to this law to protect children.

Thank you for your fair consideration of this submission.

Marie Keen

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