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## MEDIA STATEMENT

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth

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**Date: Thursday 28 November, 2019.**

As the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, I acknowledge the McGowan Government's announcement today regarding the proposed introduction of changes to the Children and Community Services Act 2004 which would require ministers of religion to report child sexual abuse. The proposed changes also seek to include the extension of mandatory reporting of information gained by a minister of religion during the sacrament of penance (otherwise referred to as the Sacrament of Confession).

I recognise the desire of the Western Australian Government to achieve the best outcomes possible for children in our State, especially in relation to the terrible scourge of sexual abuse. At the same time, I believe that the decision to extend the mandatory reporting laws to ministers of religion, including the extension of mandatory reporting of information gained by a minister of religion during the sacrament of penance, is ill-advised.

The reasons for this position are complex. They are based on the particular nature of the confession of sin in the sacrament of penance as it is understood in Catholic teaching and practice. It is this nature of confession as a personal encounter between a sinner and God, mediated by the priest, which gives rise to the requirement in Catholic teaching that the priest has no right to reveal to anyone anything he learns in the course of this ministry.

The enactment of this proposed new legislation does not necessarily equate to the guaranteed future safety of our children and young people. Should priests be designated as mandatory reporters of information they gain during the sacrament of penance, the already slim likelihood that a child abuser will come to confession will, to all intents and purposes, be curtailed.

I encourage the Western Australian Government to think again.

Sexual abuse of children and young people is an abhorrent crime wherever, whenever and by whomever it is perpetrated. As I have done on many other occasions, I would again strongly encourage anyone who has allegations of child sexual abuse against any officials connected to the Catholic Church, clergy or otherwise, to report these matters to the police.

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Catholic Archbishop of Perth

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