



CATHOLIC LEAGUE

*For Religious
and
Civil Rights*

January 23, 2025

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Dear Montana Lawmakers:

Seven Democratic State Senators have introduced a bill (No. 139) that would remove the religious exemption from a mandatory reporting law on child abuse. They are doing so for bogus reasons. Furthermore, it is an egregious violation of the First Amendment rights of the clergy.

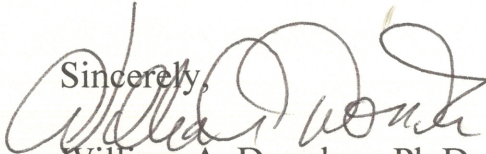
It is unwarranted because there is no breaking news on priests abusing this exemption. So what broke? There is not a scintilla of evidence that child abusers are confessing their sins to Catholic priests. Indeed, it strains credulity to argue that a person who is so depraved as to molest a child is likely to tell a priest about his behavior.

If any lawmaker has evidence that this is now a serious problem, we would like to see it. I ask this because the Catholic League has dealt with this alleged problem before in several states, and not one lawmaker has ever been able to provide such evidence; this explains why all of these efforts ultimately fail.

The First Amendment explicitly guarantees religious liberty, and that means that confidential comments made to priests in the Sacrament of Reconciliation can never be divulged. Just as journalists, lawyers, therapists, and psychiatrists cannot do their job if what they learn in confidence is subject to public disclosure, the same is true of Catholic priests in the confessional.

One more thing: it is fatuous to think that any Catholic priest would violate his vows to satisfy the interests of politicians. They would go to jail before ever disclosing confidential information.

If this bill were to become law, it will be tied up in the courts, and the prospects of it being affirmed are slim to none. Accordingly, this bill needs to be withdrawn immediately.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

cc: Gov. Greg Gianforte
Bishop Austin Anthony Vetter, Diocese of Helena
Dan Bartleson, Director of Communications, Diocese of Helena
Bishop Jeffrey M. Fleming, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings
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