

Media Release

The Hon Luke Donnellan MP
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**DELIVERING
FOR ALL VICTORIANS**

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ENSURING BETTER PROTECTIONS FOR ALL VICTORIAN CHILDREN

Religious and spiritual leaders will be forced to report child abuse to authorities under new laws introduced by the Andrews Labor Government to better protect Victoria's children.

The *Children Legislation Amendment Bill 2019* will be introduced to Parliament today and will see people in religious ministries added to the list of mandated reporters to child protection and the confessional seal lifted for suspected abuse, delivering on a key election commitment.

Mandatory reporting refers to the legal requirement for nominated professional groups to report a reasonable belief of physical or sexual child abuse to authorities.

The Labor Government has already expanded mandated reporter groups to include police, teachers, medical practitioners, nurses, school counsellors and early childhood and youth justice workers.

Under current laws, priests and spiritual leaders in religious ministries are not mandatory reporters – but the Government is acting to end this special treatment.

In addition, the Bill includes amendments to ensure that under the Failure to Disclose offence contained in the Crimes Act, disclosures of abuse during religious confession will not be exempt and must be reported to police.

The Bill also creates landmark reforms to allow survivors of sexual and non-sexual institutional abuse to apply to the courts to overturn unfair historical compensation payments.

A series of additional amendments in the Bill will also seek to strengthen the protection of children, including:

- Limiting the right of appeal to VCAT for persons whose Working With Children Check application is rejected if they, as an adult, have been charged with, convicted or found guilty of a Category A offence. These offences are the most serious offences for the purposes of the Act and include murder and rape
- Allowing siblings where one is Aboriginal and the other is not, to both be a part of the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program, ensuring better connection to culture and community for children in care
- Clarifying that immunisation is part of routine medical care, guaranteeing vaccines for children in out-of-home care and protecting vulnerable children and adults across the entire community.

The Labor Government is working to protect all Victorian children from harm, and these significant reforms also respond directly to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Child Protection Luke Donnellan

"It's pretty simple: if you think a child is being abused, you have to report it. And we're committed to driving this cultural change to make Victoria safer for our children."

"These are significant reforms, and they will go a long way to ensuring future generations of children are protected from the harm that far too many suffered in the past."

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Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

“We promised to put the safety of children ahead of the secrecy of the confession and that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

“We’re doing everything we can to keep children safe, which is why we’re strengthening protections under the Working with Children Act by limiting the appeal rights of adults charged with or found guilty of the most serious offences.”