

Working together to develop a national redress scheme

The Catholic Church is taking a two-pronged approach to safeguarding children in the Church and to ensuring survivors of child sexual abuse from all institutions throughout Australia have access to justice.

Last week I outlined our first approach, the establishment of an internal independent supervising and auditing body in the Church. This group will develop, monitor and report on national child protection standards for all dioceses, religious orders and PJPs throughout Australia.

The second approach is the establishment of a national redress scheme operated by governments but funded by the institutions responsible for the abuse.

Many groups, including survivor and victim advocacy bodies, are calling for this independently run scheme that will examine every abuse case individually and determine fair and consistent compensation for survivors.

In October, at the launch of Blue Knot Day in Canberra, Justice McClellan spoke of the importance of developing an effective redress scheme. He acknowledged the challenges in ensuring justice for all victims and said government and institutions with the necessary resources, must come together to provide appropriate redress for all who have suffered sexual abuse as a child.

Like many institutions, including the Catholic Church, governments have been exposed in the Royal Commission hearings. Over the past few months it has been encouraging to see some real movements from state governments as they announce reforms to the way in which they will respond to survivors of abuse in state run institutions.

Despite this, the government has remained relatively silent on the issue of a national redress scheme.

One of the dangers of Royal Commissions is that governments, of every persuasion at every level, can avoid committing to the recommendations.

We have seen this in the past with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, where reports and their recommendations basically remain on the shelf and governments paid lip service to the findings.

If this risk is to be avoided with the current Royal Commission all stakeholders must commit to ensuring children are much safer in our communities and that survivors get access to consistent, fair and reasonable redress, regardless of where or when crimes were committed, or of the size of available coffers.

Blog

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By mid 2015 Justice McClellan will make recommendations to all governments of Australia outlining what type of redress will be necessary to adequately meet the needs of survivors abused in all institutions in Australia.

The Royal Commission will obviously seek to recommend the best scheme in the interests of survivors. What is essential is that all jurisdictions and all institutions line up with the same principles and do not succumb to self-interest and institutional protection. Otherwise the work of this Royal Commission, the angst of survivors who have been brave enough to front the hearings and the private sessions, and of the institutions who have put significant resources into ensuring the truth comes out, will have been seriously undermined.

The Catholic Church is calling for a generous, capped redress scheme with no time limitations that will give victims a real alternative to the harrowing and expensive court processes currently available and the very limited Statutory Victims of Crime Compensation Schemes.

Francis Sullivan
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www.tjhcouncil.org.au