

Notice of Motion, Councillor Nicolas Frances Gilley: Ensuring safety of children at places of worship in our municipality

15 October 2019

Motion

1. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
 - 1.1. Commends the adoption in the Victorian Parliament of new laws which carry sentences of up to three years for workers in places of worship who fail to report cases of child abuse or mistreatment.
 - 1.2. Notes with concern, reports in the media suggesting that some places of worship, as indicated by the Catholic Archbishop for Melbourne, will defy the laws as a means of protecting religious beliefs such as the confessional seal.
 - 1.3. Reaffirms City of Melbourne's Goal as *A City for People* and one which seeks to create a safe, healthy and welcoming city for people of all ages including children
 - 1.4. Requests management to undertake the following:
 - 1.4.1. Immediately seek a public declaration of compliance with mandatory reporting laws from places of worship in the municipality;
 - 1.4.2. Following the outcome of 1.4.1, ensure increased community awareness of those places of worship who fail to acknowledge compliance or do not respond to the request to affirm their commitment to comply with reporting requirements;
 - 1.4.3. Seek legal advice as to further actions available to City of Melbourne to ensure compliance.

Background

Peter Comensoli, Catholic Arch Bishop for Melbourne, has been reported as suggesting he would rather go to prison than inform the police of anything he heard in confessional with particular reference to those admitting child sexual abuse. See following links to recent media reports.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-14/melbourne-catholic-archbishop-petrer-comensoli-on-confessional/11409944>,

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/archbishop-prepared-to-risk-jail-rather-than-comply-with-confession-law-20190814-p52gzj.html>

As a Council with responsibility to ensure local citizen safety, and particularly that of our children, it is appropriate to advise children, and those caring for them, of places where they may not be safe.

As such we are asking officers to write to all churches and places of worship requesting assurances that all staff and associates will abide by the law of mandatory reporting.

In instances where this assurance is not received the Council take appropriate action that clearly advises people of the risks of using such institutions until such time as we can get legal advice on possible further action accessible to CoM.

Moved: Councillor Nicolas Frances Gilley

Seconded: Councillor Rohan Leppert