

PETITION TO OPPOSE SB 360

KEEP GOVERNMENT OUT OF CHURCH CONFESSIONALS

To Governor Newsom and Members of the Legislature:

We, the people of California, by our signatures affixed below, urge you to reject Senate Bill (SB) 360. This legislation, while claiming to combat abuse, instead unleashes unprecedented criminal prosecution of clergy who protect the confessions and confidences entrusted to them.

Please consider the following:

- For more than 1,000 years, ministers in a wide variety of traditions have received confessions from every segment of society.
- In many traditions, confessions are deemed so sacrosanct that priests or clergy who disclose them are subject to excommunication.
- For more than 200 years, constitutional and common law in the United States has embraced the clergy-penitent privilege, alongside other privileges such as attorney-client, doctor-patient, and marital privilege, as an indispensable part of restorative justice.
- SB 360, supposedly a response to the clergy sexual abuse scandals, fails to address such scandals, which typically involve administrative or ecclesiastical disciplinary coverups, not confessions.
- Currently, California already has 46 different types of individuals who are mandatory reporters of abuse or neglect.
- Current definitions of emotional abuse and neglect are so broad that they mandate reporting of a parent's suspected failure to provide attention or "normal living experiences" for their children.
- Failure to immediately report suspected abuse is a criminal offense.
- SB 360 sets up a collision between millennia-old religious values of the highest order and the State's attempts to create new crimes and seize new prosecutorial powers.
- SB 360 is blatantly unconstitutional and would likely be overturned in court.

We therefore respectfully but strongly urge you to reject SB 360.

Signed: _____

Name, city, and church of signer: _____