

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

GOVERNOR-GENERAL AMENDMENT (CESSATION OF ALLOWANCES IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST) BILL 2023

From: Reverend Jim Pilmer PSM OAM

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11th July 2023

I make this submission, aware of the content of other submissions to date and a range of legal and other viewpoints contained therein. I oppose the Bill in its present form.

As an Anglican priest it was my privilege to witness the dedicated ministry of Dr Peter Hollingworth in inner-city Melbourne in the early 1970's. It's easy to overlook the poverty and suffering of Melbourne's Fitzroy area almost 60 years ago. Dr Hollingworth didn't sit behind a desk as a parish priest or administrator. He didn't theorise about how to make the world a better place. He walked the streets and lanes, was part of teams that provided food to the homeless in the darkness of winter mornings and worked tirelessly for the under-privileged. Years later I witnessed him still leading by example and sharing in the distribution of food when he was Archbishop of Brisbane.

Dr Hollingworth translated his insights to several published books which became educational texts in the field of social service. Through his work as Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence he led both research and practical outcomes for the needy and the flow-on effects of his dedicated ministry benefited not only those recipients but influenced the social consciences of individuals, politicians and communities across Australia and overseas.

His community work with agencies and groups such as Rotary International is well documented and left a lasting legacy. It was for the above demonstrated gifts, abilities and integrity that the Anglican Church appointed Dr Hollingworth as a bishop and in due course elected him as Archbishop of Brisbane.

It is perhaps difficult for those outside the Church to grasp the implications of much of its language and teaching but a fundamental understanding of the Gospel and priesthood is that an ordained person will be a pastor to his/her people.

The role of bishop expands that responsibility considerably.

*Chief Pastor* is a position not accepted lightly due to its complexity in practice. It is here that I suggest Dr Hollingworth found himself conflicted between the compassion and forgiveness which are fundamental to the Christian Faith and the confronting issues of sexual abuse, about which the church and its clergy at that time had only a superficial understanding.

I was Chairman of the Diocese of Melbourne's Sexual Harassment Committee for some 8 years in the 1980's; pre-dating the development of professional standards protocols and certainly before the Kooyoora professional standards organisation was established in Victoria. I assisted in the creation of the early Professional Standards Guidelines and I remain acutely aware of the complexity of dealing with issues of sexual abuse; albeit acknowledging the limited understanding of the profound and potentially horrific issues with which we were dealing back then. It was a learning curve for the various individuals involved and for the Church itself. There was what I might term a *worldwide ignorance* at that time about the prevalence and very serious nature of sexual abuse in both church and society.

As a clinically accredited director of the Anglican Marriage Guidance Council (Melbourne) for 9 years I worked with numerous cases of women who were sexually abused within their marriages.

As full-time senior police chaplain (Victoria Police) for 13 years I supported police members who were themselves abused as children and worked with units whose whole focus was dealing with sexual offences. I am not ignorant of the suffering which results and its long term effects.

Whilst such offences may well fall into black and white legal categories they are not so easily defined by those who are not police or lawyers but pastors operating not only out of a distinct set of values but of vows made at their ordination and/or consecration.

These present a bishop or archbishop with dilemmas which relate to the ramifications of disciplinary action against a perpetrator, the physical welfare and mental health of the victim, the reputations of the perpetrator's and victim's families and the ever-present risk of triggering a suicide amongst those involved on either side.

An allegation inevitably draws in a wide range of people from the fringes, including whole congregations, for whom the bishop also has responsibility.

In such instances delays in acting decisively are open to misinterpretation. *Sweeping the issue under the carpet* and *a failure to act* are two such claims but I submit that an *act of omission* is not necessarily a wilful act but the possible outcome of carefulness and potentially conflicting advice from various quarters. What is seen as an act of omission is not the result of passivity but of taking a certain line of action after sorting through a maze of information, disinformation and distressing possibilities.

Where a bishop is convincingly lied to by an offender there is opportunity for him/her to make an error of judgement and there is evidence to suggest that this was the case in the matters at the heart of this review of the Act.

As regards discussion concerning cessation of Dr Hollingworth's allowances and privileges it is pertinent to remember that Dr Hollingworth was nominated to be Governor General after the usual background checks. The matters feeding into this debate were not offences or omissions directly related to the office of Governor General.

Dr Hollingworth has apologised on at least 4 occasions for the outcome of his decisions while Archbishop of Brisbane. For aggrieved parties to use the review of the Act to remorselessly pursue him at this stage of his life suggests a motive other than one aimed at making a constructive contribution to the future handling of such matters.

There is no doubt room for an updating of the existing Act but applying heartless retrospectivity in the case of an 88 year old man who is still grieving the loss of his wife and has now been forced to relinquish his role as priest and bishop is a gross overreaction. It is difficult to interpret this as being 'in the public interest' and also risks diminishing the dignity of the office of Governor General for future recipients.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.