

VICTORY IN CALIFORNIA; CONFESSIONAL BILL WITHDRAWN

The seal of confession is safe in California. The bill to bust it has been pulled.

On July 8, the eve of a scheduled hearing on SB 360, California State Sen. Jerry Hill withdrew his bill; it would have broken the seal of the confessional in some instances. He pulled his legislation once he realized he didn't have enough votes to make it out of the Assembly Public Safety Committee.

The effort to stop the bill was led by Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez. The Catholic League played an ancillary role, mobilizing tens of thousands of Catholics: we provided them with email contacts that they used effectively. We are proud of Archbishop Gomez and all of those Catholics who supported him. We are also happy to report that many non-Catholics stepped up their support as well.

In making the case against SB 360, we cited three major concerns: the damage it would do to religious liberty; the dubious predicate of the bill; and its unenforceability.

The idea of having the government police the details of a Catholic sacrament is draconian. Furthermore, it would forever place in jeopardy the religious liberty protections afforded by the First Amendment. It would also do irreparable damage to the priest-penitent relationship, compromising, as it would, the confidentiality of the confessional.

Sen. Hill said that the bill was necessitated because "the clergy-penitent privilege has been abused on a large scale, resulting in underreported and systemic abuse of thousands of children across multiple denominations and faiths."

On June 12, Bill Donohue wrote to Sen. Hill about his claim.

“Could you please provide my office with documentation to support that claim? I will not be coy: I don’t believe you can. But go ahead and prove me wrong.” He never answered, and we both know why.

On June 25, Donohue wrote to Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, chairman of the Public Safety Committee in charge of the bill. He asked him to reconsider the legislation. “It is not only the wrong remedy,” he said, “it is unenforceable as well.”

These are just two of the many exchanges with lawmakers we had about this bill.

This is a smashing victory. Many thanks to all of those who contacted these legislators. Without your input—your follow through—there may very well have been a different outcome. We can set the agenda, and provide the email contacts, but only you can make it happen. There is strength in numbers.

Donohue very much appreciated the kind note of gratitude that Archbishop Gomez sent. We stand ready to support him, and all the bishops, who are defending religious liberty during these turbulent times.