News



Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles speaks during a lecture at The Catholic University of America in Washington Feb. 6, 2019. The Los Angeles Archdiocese and five other California dioceses, Fresno, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino and San Diego, announced a new independent compensation program for sex abuse victims. Gomez and the state's other Catholic bishops also are speaking out against a bill to do away with the seal of confession in cases of abuse. (CNS/Bob Roller)

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Los Angeles — May 21, 2019
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Church officials are urging Catholics to continue to oppose a California bill that would force priests to disclose information about child sexual abuse that they hear in the sacrament of confession.

The call came as the Senate measure, known as S.B. 360, advanced in the Legislature after lawmakers "accepted several of the church's recommendations to strengthen mandated reporting requirements for clergy," as Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez noted in a May 20 statement.

However, despite the changes, the bill remains "an unacceptable violation of our religious freedoms that will do nothing to protect children," the archbishop said.

As amended, the bill now protects the seal of the confessional – except in cases where a priest is hearing another priest's confession or in cases where a priest is hearing the confession of a co-worker.

Current California law requires clergy to report suspected abuse or neglect unless the information about the abuse was obtained during confession.

S.B. 360, authored by a Bay-area Democrat, Sen. Jerry Hill, seeks to eliminate this so-called "exemption" for "penitential communication."

On May 16, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted 4-2 to send an amended version of S.B. 360 to the full Senate for a vote. The measure was expected to go to the Senate floor as early May 21.

In his statement, Gomez said that as amended, "S.B. 360 still denies the sanctity of confession to every priest in the state and to thousands of Catholics who work with priests in parishes and other church agencies and ministries."

In the run-up to the Appropriations Committee hearing, Gomez had urged a no vote on S.B. 360. More than 1,300 people contacted their senators through the website of

the California Catholic Conference – urging lawmakers to keep the seal of confession sacred.

"I am grateful that senators heard the voice of the Catholic people – who understand that confession is a sacred space, an intimate dialogue between the believer and the living God," Gomez said. "We know that no government, for whatever reason, should violate the privacy and confidentiality of that sacred conversation."

He said the Catholic community would continue to oppose S.B. 360 and would work with lawmakers for "a bill that truly advances

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