

Institutional Processes for Dealing with Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse

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Institutional processes for dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse, such as the Catholic Church's Towards Healing statement, fail to recognize that the public has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the processes used to investigate complaints and offer assistance to victims are transparent, rigorous and accountable. These institutional processes inadequately balance the public interest with the private interests belonging to the stakeholders in these claims. The need for confidentiality that is invoked in seeking to protect private interests directly undermines public confidence in the process. Greater recognition needs to be given by institutions to the legitimacy of the public interest, and this legitimacy needs to be reflected in the processes used. The role of such processes in educating the public and thus having a preventative function needs also to be recognized. At the same time the public needs to recognize the legitimacy of claims by stakeholders to use confidential processes until clear findings have been made in relation to allegations. The paper will suggest a new model for dealing with claims within institutions arising out of allegations of sexual abuse, that moves closer to finding that elusive balance between the public and private interests.