

09 September 2026

Submission to the Governance and Administration Committee on the ***Crimes (Virginity Testing Practices) Amendment Bill***.

The Justice and Peace Commission greatly welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Crimes (Virginity Testing Practices) Amendment Bill.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) affirms the inherent dignity of every person, created in the image of God. Human worth and dignity are not dependent on gender, sexual history, marital status, or compliance with cultural or religious expectations. We therefore support the intent of this Bill to protect women and girls, and their right to safety, from practices that may be degrading, coercive, or harmful to self, body, spirit or mind. The Bill rightly recognises that virginity testing lacks scientific validity and has been associated with grievous violations of human rights and the wellbeing of women and girls worldwide.

We are particularly mindful of the CST principle of the preferential option for the vulnerable. The concerns raised in support of the Bill highlight the reality that women and girls often experience family, social, cultural, religious or community pressure to undergo virginity testing or related procedures. Where power imbalances exist, consent cannot be fully or freely given. The law has an important role in protecting those who are vulnerable to coercion and abuse.¹ This is one such opportunity where legislation and policy can protect those most vulnerable.

Our stance on the Bill is also informed by the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Crown's responsibility of active protection includes protecting the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of all people. We encourage the Committee to ensure that Māori voices, particularly those of wāhine Māori, and Māori healthcare providers, continue to be heard throughout the development of this legislation.

At the same time, Catholic Social Teaching recognises the importance of human agency, participation, and proportionality in public policy. We therefore strongly encourage the Committee to carefully consider how the legislation applies in situations involving competent adults, and to ensure that any criminal sanctions are appropriately targeted towards preventing coercion, exploitation, and harm (including self,

¹ Waiwiri-Smith, L. (2025, December 17). *Government considering ban on 'virginity testing'*. The Spinoff. <https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/17-12-2025/government-considering-ban-on-virginity-testing>

psychological or spiritual harm). We also encourage measures that promote education, prevention, and community engagement alongside legal reform.

On a personal note, from our Executive Secretary, as a woman and wāhine Māori of a particular religious and faith persuasion, questions arise whether this or any other invasive procedure or pseudo medical virginity testing, with or without consent, would be tolerated or considered if it were happening to our young males, boys and men.

The fact that these archaic forms of supposed 'virginity testing' are still relevant for girls and females in the 21st century speaks more of a lack of education, and a tendency toward harmful mindsets and mentalities that dictate the physical violation or surgical modification of female genitalia in order to validate a supposed physical, moral or spiritual value i.e. the virginal status. If an adult female seeks 'restorative' surgery to falsify virginity, should we not also be concerned that there is an oppressive and inexcusable ideal demanding this supposed physical evidence from her? Surgery should therefore only be performed on medical grounds outside the context of virginity testing or pseudo virginity restoration. On this point we align with the RCOG opposition on both virginity testing practices and related surgical procedures.²

To conclude, we reiterate our support of the purpose of this Bill and its commitment to protecting human dignity. We urge the Committee to ensure that legislation remains focused on safeguarding vulnerable women and girls. Legislation must be informed by survivor experiences and voices, reflect Te Tiriti obligations, and promote the common good and safety of all people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

² RCOG position statement virginity testing and hymenoplasty. (2021).

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/media/qlxh3wro/rcog-virginity-testing-hymenoplasty-position-statement-august-2021.pdf>