

# Community welcomes child-abuse inquiry

LIVIA ALBECK-RIPKA

MELBOURNE'S Jewish community has welcomed the state government's announcement of a parliamentary inquiry into the handling of child-abuse cases by religious organisations.

Plans to launch a year-long investigation follow revelations that at least 40 victims of the Catholic clergy had committed suicide, and they come in the wake of a police probe into allegations of abuse at Melbourne's Yeshivah College.

Rabbinic Council of Victoria president Rabbi Yaakov Glasman said the announcement was "not only welcome but ... long overdue".

"The safety and protection of the most vulnerable group within society,

namely children, must come before anything else. It's as simple as that. Children implicitly trust adults, and both the betrayal of that trust and the non-reporting of that betrayal is a crime against humanity," Glasman said.

Manny Waks, who alleges he was a victim of abuse at Yeshivah College two decades ago, said the parliamentary committee's power to compel witnesses to testify, and to elicit documents and electronic information, would uncover evidence of abuse and expose cover-ups. "No institution should be above the law, and it is about time these religious institutions are held to account," he said.

Melbourne's Yeshivah College also welcomed the inquiry. "The school

has adopted a leadership role by prioritising child safety, providing training programs and ensuring effective policies to prevent – and procedures to deal with – issues should they arise," said a spokesperson.

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be above the law."**

**Manny Waks**  
Anti-abuse campaigner

Liberal MP David Southwick said opposition to the inquiry was baseless and that the investigation should have bipartisan support.

He lambasted deputy chair of the Family and Community Development Committee Frank McGuire, who

argued a parliamentary inquiry would be impotent.

"If he is playing party politics, then the member should be ashamed for his brazen attempt to use the pain and anguish of others for the benefit of the Labor Party," Southwick said.

Waks said while a Royal Commission would have been ideal, he was pleased there was a serious, high-level parliamentary inquiry underway.

"From my own experience and knowledge, I can testify that there has been widespread sexual abuse against many children within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Victoria, which was practically common knowledge to both community members and its leaders," he said.