

Cover story

Yeshivah pledges full cooperation with Royal Commission on abuse

PETER KOHN

JEWISH community leaders have welcomed this week's federal government announcement of a Royal Commission into sexual abuse of children at religious institutions, schools, sporting organisations, and scouting and guides groups.

The landmark inquiry is expected to have broad scope, and will look at incidents going back several decades, with Jewish institutions included in its national investigations.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced on Monday that the commission's brief will include examining institutions' conduct on learning of child abuse incidents under their roof, and whether groups covered up knowledge or failed to report episodes of abuse. "Any instance of child abuse is an evil and vile thing," she said. "It is appropriate for there to be a national response through a Royal Commission. This, I hope, will help with the healing."

The announcement of a commission comes after years of public debate about the conduct of church groups in protecting priests and other leaders entrusted with the care of children who allegedly committed sex offences against minors.

But it also coincides with developments in the Jewish community. In July next year, David Samuel Cyprys, a former security guard at Melbourne's Yeshivah College, will stand trial in the Victorian County Court on 41 charges relating to alleged incidents of abuse in the 1980s and 1990s against 12 children aged between seven and 20. Cyprys has pleaded not guilty to the charges and is currently free on bail with a \$50,000 surety.

Meanwhile, convicted paedophile David Kramer is facing extradition to Australia from the United States,

where he has served a prison sentence for child abuse he committed there. He is expected to face charges regarding similar crimes allegedly committed at Melbourne's Yeshivah College, where he was a teacher.

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Rabbi Yehoshua Smukler
Principal, Yeshivah College

The announcement of the commission was welcomed by victims' advocate Manny Waks, who told *The AJN* he sees it as "a welcome development in obtaining justice for the many victims of child sexual abuse within religious institutions. There have been many unanswered questions ... it is hoped that this process will identify precisely what happened, so that: (a) those responsible will be held to full account; and (b) we can ensure that such actions will not be repeated.

Rabbi Yehoshua Smukler, principal of Yeshivah College, also welcomed the commission. The school released a letter in August this year acknowledging and apologising for "historical wrongs", assuring parents it is cooperating fully with police, and that it is "not aware of anyone who poses a risk to our children" among current workers at the college.

Stating that the school "will fully cooperate with the inquiry", and "continue to act vigilantly to eradicate abuse", Rabbi Smukler told *The AJN*, "Child abuse is abhorrent and has traumatic consequences for victims and their families. Victims of abuse deserve support and closure, and a Royal Commission is a very positive and welcome step."

Monday's news was also hailed by the Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV). "The RCV reaffirms its utmost condemnation of those who perpetrate such evils against children or turn a blind eye to them," said RCV president Rabbi Yaakov Glasman. He also stressed that any arguments urging communal authorities not to fully report child abuse incidents on the

basis of halachah were "complete without foundation".

The sentiment was echoed Organisation of Rabbis of Australia (ORA) president Rabbi Meir Gutnick, who said: "ORA is on record as stating that halachah requires reporting to, and cooperation with the relevant authorities in all cases of child sexual abuse, in order that children are protected and this heinous crime be eradicated from our midst." Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence chair Deborah Wiener said: "We hope that this will enable the victims to have their say and be heard and will go some way to easing their pain ... A failure to protect children is the worst of all abuses."

Jewish Community Council Victoria president Nina Bassat said she hoped the inquiry would provide not only "clarity as to what occurred but guidelines as to how to move forward" in combating child sex abuse within the Jewish community. "The Jewish community not only welcomes it but hopes it will be part of the healing process of our victims."

US court upholds Kramer extradition

ADAM KAMIEN

CONVICTED paedophile David Kramer's (pictured) efforts to avoid extradition have failed with a US court ordering the former Yeshivah College teacher back to Australia to face charges, including indecent assault and indecent acts with a child under the age of 16.

Kramer was arrested in St Louis, Missouri, moments after being released from prison, where he had served four years of a seven-year sen-



tence for molesting a 12-year-old boy.

Kramer is alleged to have sexually abused four boys at Yeshivah College between 1989 and 1992, before being spirited away to Israel by the school.

A spokesperson from the Attorney-General's Department would not confirm when Kramer was due back in Australia, saying only that he is "wanted by Victorian authorities to face prosecution for the offences of indecent assault and indecent acts with a child under the age of 16".

"Mr Kramer was arrested in the United States on April 23, 2012 in response to Australia's request for his

extradition," the department's spokesperson continued.

Kramer's lawyer Matthew Chase told *The AJN* that the extradition order was upheld by a judge on October 2 but could not say when his client would return to Australia.

"The extradition was upheld. My efforts were not successful in blocking it," Chase told *The AJN*.

Chase said Kramer had been ferried from prison to prison, including facilities in Missouri, Oklahoma and now Texas, from where he expects the convicted child molester will return to Australia.