

## Mandatory reporting for rabbis

ADAM KAMIEN

THE Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV) has welcomed the recommendations of a new report into Victoria's child protection system, which concluded reporting of child abuse should be made mandatory for clerics of all religions.

While teachers and medical professionals are already required by law to disclose information about child abuse, the 900-page report recommends mandatory reporting be extended to include childcare workers, kindergarten teachers and clerics, and that those who fail to report suspected abuse should face prosecution.

Claims last year that allegations of abuse at Melbourne's Yeshivah College in the 1980s and 1990s were not reported at the time, and were covered up, sent shockwaves through the community. Investigations into the allegations are currently under way.

President of the RCV Rabbi Yaakov Glasman said the safety of the community's most vulnerable members was vital.

"This recommendation is welcome and is, in my view, long overdue," Rabbi Glasman said.

"Whilst the element of confidentiality between a rabbi and his congregant is and always will be of paramount importance, it should never be at the cost of the safety of our children," he said.

The report specifies that confession to priests would be exempt but doesn't address the rabbi/congregant paradigm directly.

The report, compiled by retired Supreme Court Judge Phillip Cummins was tabled in parliament on Tuesday and made 90 recommendations, including a separate inquiry into how religious organisations have handled allegations of abuse.

"A formal investigation should be conducted into the processes

by which religious organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children by religious personnel within their organisations," the report read.

The report also recommended repealing laws that allow judges to suppress the names of convicted sex offenders.

Jewish child abuse victim and president of Adults Surviving Child Abuse Dr Cathy Kezelman said inaction was too costly.

"The cost of not addressing the life-cycle impacts of abuse and neglect are substantial, in individual, community, child protection and economic terms," Kezelman said.

"Investment in responsiveness to trauma right through the life cycle will improve health and welfare outcomes, reduce crisis presentations — hospitalisations related to mental illness, substance abuse, suicidality, self harm and the costs of homelessness and criminal justice issues."