



Media release

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry to hear from cult experts, people with lived experience and faith representatives

Next week, the parliamentary inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups will continue its public hearings at Parliament House.

On Monday 20 October from 11:30 am, the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee will hear from Elise Heerde, a practitioner with lived experience, and Raphael Aron, Director of Cult Consulting Australia. Former Victoria Police investigator, Lex De Man and Ben Shenton, who has lived experience with The Family, will also give evidence.

On Tuesday 21 October from 9:30 am, the Committee will hear from Dr Janja Lulich, an international expert on cultic studies, as well as representatives from The Religious Trauma Collective and Cult Information and Family Support. Freedom for Faith and the Australian Christian Lobby, along with Pastor Paul Gratton, will also appear before the Committee to provide evidence. The hearings will be streamed live on the Committee's website.

The hearings will be streamed live on the [Committee's website](#) where the schedules for each day are available.

"As we continue with the inquiry, the Committee is focused on how Victoria can better protect and support people from the dangers of coercive groups, while also respecting and safeguarding the right to religious freedom and belief," Committee Chair Ella George said.

"This inquiry is not about judging belief or faith, it's about understanding where harm occurs within coercive groups and how to respond appropriately. The evidence we're hearing will help the Committee shape practical and balanced recommendations to protect people and uphold fundamental freedoms."

Previous hearings were held in July and October, and further hearings will be held. The Committee is due to report its findings to Parliament by September 2026.

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