



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Deputy Chair)

Mr Andrew Braddock MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Electoral Amendment Bill 2021

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Mr Jeremy Hanson CSC MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety
ACT Legislative Assembly
By Email: LACommitteeJCS@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Mr Hanson

Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the Electoral Amendment Bill 2021 in relation to lowering the voting age.

Labor is a strong defender of Australia's compulsory voting system, and we support Australia's highly successful system of compulsory voting in Territory, State and Federal elections. Whilst ACT Labor supports the Committee's consideration of lowering the voting age, it is our view that introducing voluntary voting is not appropriate in the context of Australia's voting system. Our current compulsory system ensures some of the strongest voter turnout and engagement in the world, which should be the aim of any democratic voting system.

ACT Labor's position, based on our Policy Platform, is that ACT Labor supports compulsory voting and consideration should be given to allowing people 16 and 17 years of age to vote.

There are a number of matters the Committee will need to consider, many already well outlined in submissions to the Committee's Inquiry into the 2020 Election and Electoral Act. ACT Labor would suggest there are a few key matters which will be particularly important to consider:

Voluntary voting:

Consistency:

ACT Labor contended during the hearings of the Committee's Inquiry into the 2020 ACT Election and the Electoral Act that any change must be adequately communicated, and that communication must be consistent. This is particularly challenging with the proposal that voting be made voluntary for electors aged 16 and 17 and then compulsory from 18 onwards. This may inadvertently lead to a cohort of young ACT voters who "miss the memo" in future elections. There is also the challenge of inconsistency between voting age for Federal and Territory elections, this inconsistency may present a significant communication challenge to avoid mixed messaging outlining voting requirements when Federal and Territory elections are held in close proximity, such as in 2016.

Voter Suppression:

Introducing voluntary voting also introduces the opportunity for voter suppression. Voter suppression is a strategy used to influence an election by actively attempting to dissuade or distract a group of voters from voting. More commonly seen within



vulnerable communities, it is a challenge that presents itself in many voluntary voting jurisdictions and is one of many reasons that compulsory voting is more appropriate in representative democracies. Whilst we hope that these sorts of tactics are not used in any circumstances, it is worth noting as we continue to see campaigns of misinformation during elections.

Compulsory voting:

Voter turnout and engagement:

As highlighted in the ACT Electoral Commission's Submission to the Inquiry into the 2020 ACT Election and Electoral Act, previous studies have outlined the challenges in politically engaging younger voters.

As the Electoral Commission has highlighted in their submission, considerable funding and support would be necessary to support the increased role of the Commission in not only managing the enrolment and roll for 16- and 17-year-olds, but also in engaging and communicating with them in respect of their obligations.

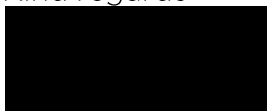
Fines for voters aged under 18:

Legislation requires that every person who is entitled to vote must be enrolled and vote in an election.

16- and 17-year-olds who fail to vote could be subject to financial penalties, when research already indicates being able to communicate and engage effectively with this group is a challenge for governments.

Thank you again for your consideration of these matters. I am happy to provide any further information or appear before the Committee. I look forward to the Committee's report.

Kind regards



Ash van Dijk
ACT Labor Secretary