



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
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hanson

I am pleased to provide this Submission to the Committee's Inquiry into the *Electoral Amendment Bill 2021*. I make this submission on behalf of the organisational wing of our party, which is separate to the parliamentary wing led in the Assembly by Elizabeth Lee.

The Committee considered the issue of lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 years extensively only 8 months ago during its *Inquiry into the 2020 ACT Election and the Electoral Act*. The position of the Canberra Liberals presented during the hearing on 26 May 2021 remains unchanged.

This Bill is a poorly masked attempt by the Greens to increase their vote in ACT elections. If you are changing the law based on trying to increase or decrease a vote share that is a bad motivator for change. Greens Senator Steele-John acknowledged this when the issue was raised during an interview on Sky News on 19 June 2018:

Tom Connell: ...it would help the Greens wouldn't it?

Senator Steele-John: Well that is something which is often said but if look at the research, of people that have actually spoken to young people, 16, 17 year olds about how they would vote, they split pretty evenly amongst the three parties. I think what's...

Tom Connell: You say split evenly? So a third each?

Senator Steele-John: Yeah, a third each.

Tom Connell: That'd be a huge help for the Greens compared to your normal vote.

The Explanatory Statement accompanying the Bill is a contradiction in itself. It outlines changing the age is consistent with cognitive maturity, yet also seeks to reduce penalties for 16 – 17 year olds who failure to vote with the inherent acknowledgement that the maturity may not be great enough to understand the consequences of democratic responsibility.

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An argument often espoused by proponents of this reform is that people under the age of 18 can pay tax, participate in society and that governments make decisions that can affect them. This is a fragile argument at best.

Companies pay corporate tax and decisions are made that affect their business, however we do not give corporations a vote.

Similarly, if we take the argument advanced by many of this proposal's proponents to its fullest extent it would permit toddlers who are the beneficiary of the government's childcare reforms a vote. While 16 and 17 year olds are naturally more politically engaged than toddlers, the fact remains the acts of taxation and government benefits alone are evidently not considered adequate for enfranchisement.

Finally, while we dismiss this Bill as a cheap vote grabbing exercise from the Greens, it is vital that young people feel heard and optimistic about their future. There is however, no evidence to support extending the franchise will assist in this.

While there are activities for which the age of maturity is 16, the majority of government-regulated activities is still 18. The Canberra Liberals maintain 18 is the appropriate age to extend the franchise and is in line with other civic responsibilities.

I appreciate the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely



Kieran Douglas
Divisional Director
Canberra Liberals