



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Electoral Amendment Bill 2021

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Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

ACT Government

18 January 2022

Dear Committee members,

I write in **strong support of lowering the voting age in the ACT to 16**. Young people have the most at stake when deciding how we'll lay the policy pathways that lead us into the future, as they have the most years left to live. It is right to give them the ability (and responsibility) to vote. With complex, long-term problems – particularly climate change – confronting policymakers, the political engagement of young people will only enhance the standards of our democracy and improve policy decisions.

I write with some personal experience informing my strong support for this proposition. I'm now in my mid-thirties, but my teen years were a formative time for my social and political awareness. In 2003, when I was in grade 11 (16 years old) at a state high school in Brisbane, Australia invaded Iraq in alliance with the US military regime. The horror and injustice of the war caused me to feel great despair. The fact that I had no means of formal democratic participation to express my opposition to the way through our most central political institution – voting in elections – made me angry. The despair and anger motivated me to become involved with the student-led antiwar protest movement of the mid-2000s. This experience was valuable, and I learnt a lot about social change, power, and politics. My experiences during this time fundamentally shaped how I still understand the world to this day. And central to that experience was witnessing the clear disregard shown by those in power for young people like I was at the time.

I believe that protest movements are important for our democracy, and I don't mean to suggest that if I had the ability to vote I would not have joined the protest movement, nor that such an outcome would be desirable. (Upon honest reflection, I believe I would have joined the protest movement AND voted, but I would not have felt such anger at the decision-makers and their institutions that excluded me from participating in voting to express my position on something so important.) But it was that palpable anger at understanding the

implications of the Iraq invasion, and knowing that those in power *did not want to know and did not care what I thought* that drove me to find alternative ways to participate in democracy.

But for many young people (and this was the case for many of my classmates from 2003) the recognition of a great injustice alongside exclusion from electoral voting does not prompt engagement with alternative spaces for democratic expression. Instead, it prompts democratic disengagement and alienation, a sense of fatalism, and – tragically – apathy. Political awareness without the ability to vote can be a singularly powerful experience that drives disengagement from civic life. In my view, and based on my experience, lowering the voting age to 16 would show respect for the insight (and the futures) of young people, inviting them to exercise the great privilege and responsibility that is democratic participation.

And in Australia, if not in the ACT, then where?

Thank you for your consideration. I give my permission for my submission to be published in full on the website, but with my name removed.

Sincerely,

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