



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Public
Accounts and Administration

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submission number: 01

Submitter: Sarah Ahmed

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration

RE: Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submitted by: Sarah Ahmed

Contact Details:

- Phone: [REDACTED]
- Email: [REDACTED]
- Postal Address: [REDACTED]

Date: 12 September 2025

Executive Summary

I write to express my strong support for the Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This legislation represents a critical opportunity for the ACT to lead Australia in implementing genuine systemic reform to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Key Arguments in Support of the Bill

1. Current approaches have failed to deliver results

The evidence is clear that existing approaches are insufficient:

- The Productivity Commission review found governments have failed to deliver promised systemic reforms
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review reached similar conclusions
- Despite significant investment and good intentions, life outcome gaps persist for First Nations people in the ACT

2. Legal framework will drive accountability

This bill will create enforceable commitments by:

- Embedding Closing the Gap targets into ACT legislation
- Creating clear accountability mechanisms for government agencies
- Ensuring consistent implementation across the public sector
- Providing measurable benchmarks for progress

3. ACT can lead national reform

The ACT has an opportunity to:

- Become the first jurisdiction to legislate Closing the Gap commitments
- Demonstrate leadership following the community's strong 'YES' vote in the Voice referendum

- Show that meaningful action can follow symbolic support

4. Addressing systemic issues requires systemic solutions

Current gaps in outcomes reflect systemic issues that require:

- Structural changes to how government operates
- Consistent approaches across all agencies and departments
- Long-term commitment beyond electoral cycles
- Clear responsibility and accountability measures

Recommendations

I recommend the Committee:

- Support passage of the bill in its current form
- Ensure adequate resourcing for implementation and monitoring
- Establish regular reporting mechanisms to track progress
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in ongoing oversight

Community Expectations

The ACT community demonstrated strong support for constitutional recognition and a Voice to Parliament. This legislation provides a concrete way to translate that support into meaningful action and systemic change.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans should not continue to bear the disproportionate burden of working toward reconciliation. Government has a responsibility to create the structural changes needed to close outcome gaps.

Conclusion

'Business as usual' has demonstrably failed to close outcome gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This legislation offers a pathway to the transformative change needed.

I urge the Committee to recommend passage of this important bill and support the ACT Government in taking this historic step toward genuine reconciliation and justice.

Request to Appear: No

Declaration: This submission has been prepared specifically for this inquiry and has not been published elsewhere or shared outside the committee process.