



Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026–2027 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026–2027

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: ACT Electoral Commission

In relation to: Administrative funding

Hearing: 31 July 2026

Uncorrected Proof Transcript p 116

Transcript provided: 3 August 2026

Answer Due: 10 August 2026

Mr Cantwell took on notice the following question(s):

MR EMERSON: Or purpose of the funding, the admin funding.

Mr Cantwell: So it cannot—you know, I think pretty clear in that it cannot be used—of course, there is definition between administrative funding and that for electoral purposes or election funding. And I make that clear when I write to either the parties or MLAs in receipt of the administrative funding that it is for that express purpose. It is determined in accordance with the legislation and paid accordingly. And it is not a strict definition. We could look to that and define or grab the exact definition for its purpose, but it is other than for electoral matters—or electoral expenditure, I should say.

MR EMERSON: I suppose, I mean, I think we may have had an exchange about this in a previous hearing, like, how it came about and what its original—what the purpose of the funding was for.

Mr Cantwell: Yes, yes, I think we did.

MR EMERSON: Obviously the Assembly can, you know, determine to fund its members in different ways. But was a significant part of that to fulfil these kind of gift disclosure obligations?

Mr Cantwell: Look, I cannot talk to the history of it, and I do recall we had such a discussion in an earlier inquiry or committee hearing. I think we left that with the agreement or the understanding that either the Assembly or we could do some research about its backgrounds, its genesis. And I cannot recall where that went to at this point in time. We might have to have a think about that. But if that is a standing question that you wish us to further look into, we could do our best to, and we could take it on notice if you wish, to understand from our recollection and from our records. We can do so. We can do that.

MR EMERSON: That would be great.

Damian Cantwell AM CSC – Electoral Commissioner: The answer to the Member’s question is as follows:

I submit my earlier response to substantially the same question received on 10 November 2025 as part of the Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024–25. The Electoral Commission's research indicates that administrative funding was introduced to assist Members and political parties meet the administrative, bookkeeping, accounting and reporting obligations arising from the ACT's election finance reforms. The materials reviewed do not expressly identify compliance with gift disclosure obligations as a distinct purpose of the funding, but they do indicate that the funding was intended to offset the broader compliance and reporting burden created by those reforms. The relevant sources are set out below:

The earliest reference identified by the Electoral Commission to the need for providing Members of the Legislative Assembly with administrative funding appears in the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety’s Review of Campaign Financing Laws in the ACT report (September 2011). The report states:

“the Committee considers that Administrative Funding should be provided to political parties, similar to that set out in Part 6A of the Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981 (NSW). This is considered in Part Three of this Chapter, ‘Direct and indirect public funding of elections’, in the sub-section ‘Acts in other jurisdictions’, as are comparable arrangements under the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld)”.

The committee subsequently recommended:

“Administrative Funding be provided to Members elected to the Legislative Assembly at a general election, based on the Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981 (NSW), Part 6A. All Administrative Funding should be subject to acquittal and audit.”

The establishment of the inaugural \$20,000 amount of administrative funding per MLA per year first appears in the Electoral (Election Finance Reform) Amendment Bill 2011, a private member’s bill introduced to the Assembly by Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA.

The Government’s response to the Committee’s *Review of Campaign Financing Laws in the ACT* report refers to the \$20,000 figure first proposed in the bill:

“this discussion will focus primarily on the new amount at play, which is a figure of \$20 000 per MLA per year, as proposed under the Election Finance Reform Bill... The Election Finance Reform Bill seeks to implement this recommendation by creating a scheme whereby MLAs and their parties are reimbursed for administrative expenses of up to \$20 000 per MLA per year.”

The Government's response also outlined the purpose of administrative funding:

"The Government understands that the payment of administrative amounts was included in the bill to counteract the additional burden of extra reporting and address concerns about restricting the right to free speech."

A further reference to the intended purpose of the funding is found in Hansard from the Eighth Assembly (pages 1942–1943), where Mr Rattenbury MLA stated:

"Administrative funding is currently paid to parties and non-party MLAs to cover the costs of administering the reporting requirements for political expenditure. This was brought in in 2012 as part of the reforms that were done in the last Assembly to enable parties to essentially cover the accounting and bookkeeping administration costs associated with the significant reporting requirements contained in those reforms. It is specifically not to be used for funding of elections. Currently, the payment made to each MLA is \$20,000 per annum and that is indexed."

Review of Campaign Financing Laws in the ACT report:

https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/373431/Campaign_Financing_Report_2011.pdf

Electoral (Election finance Reform) Amendment Bill 2011:

https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/b/db_43458/

Government response to Campaign Finance reform report:

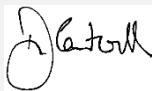
https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/373430/7th_JCS07_campaign_finance_reform.pdf

Hansard from eighth assembly:

<https://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/8th-assembly/2014/PDF/20140805.pdf>

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates

Signature:



Date: 6 Aug 2026

By the Electoral Commissioner, Damian Cantwell AM CSC