

MEG WEBB MLC

Independent Member for Nelson

The Hon. Guy Barnett MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Via email: [REDACTED]

The Hon. Jo Palmer MLC
Minister for Disability Services
Via email: [REDACTED]

Monday, 4 November 2024

Dear Attorney-General and Minister Palmer,

Urgent Re: the *Justice and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill (No. 3) 2024*

I am writing regarding the *Justice and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill (No. 3) 2024*, released for public consultation on Saturday the 1st of November.

This draft Bill contains three distinct Parts, one containing amendments to the *Electoral Act 2004* which seek to address long-standing concerns over alternative accessible voting options for Tasmanians with either a physical disability or a visual impairment.

At the outset, thank you for finally moving to address these important and long-standing concerns which have been raised over many years by disability advocacy organisations and independent stakeholders. Requiring the state meets its responsibilities to ensure all eligible voters are provided the means by which to facilitate their right and responsibility to vote is long overdue.

However, I have serious concerns over the following related matters:

I note this draft Bill is open for public consultation until Sunday 17th of November, a consultation period of approximately two weeks only. This two week consultation timeframe is utterly inadequate.

Two weeks is far short of the widely recognised appropriate consultation timeframe of at least five to six weeks.

In contrast, I note the consultation period currently open for the draft *Commission for Children and Young People Bill 2024* commenced on 19 September and closes on the 15th of December this year: a period of approximately 12 weeks.

In light of the fact the key community and advocacy stakeholder groups are those experiencing some form of visual impairment, or “print disability”, it is deeply concerning, and potentially insensitive, that such a pivotal stakeholder group are expected to access, research and respond to something so important as their ability to exercise their right to vote, all within two weeks.



nelson@parliament.tas.gov.au | megwebb.com.au

P: 03 6212 2290 | Suite 3, 32 Channel Hwy Kingston 7050 | PO Box 694, Kingston 7051



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The current limited public consultation period also risks concerns of tokenism.

Further, it is my understanding that government did not involve key stakeholder groups – including those who have campaigned for some time to have inaccessible voting options addressed – in the design or development of the proposed legislative amendments to the *Electoral Act 2004*.

If this is the case, it is an inexplicable oversight of the opportunity to demonstrate genuine inclusion and respect for stakeholder lived experience. Best practice requires the co-design and involvement of intended end users.

Ministers, I urge you provide an immediate extension to the *Justice and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill (No. 3) 2024* consultation to provide for at least a six week period. Should that extended timeframe interfere with the government's proposed timeframe for the other two Parts of the draft Bill, then I respectfully propose you excise the proposed *Electoral Act 2004* amendments and place them in a standalone Amendment Bill.

A six week public consultation period should still provide for consideration by Parliament of any final Bill, and implementation of any successful electoral reforms before the next expected Tasmanian election, that being the scheduled Legislative Council elections at the beginning of May 2025.

Further, I urge immediate discussion occurs with key stakeholders including Disability Voices Tasmania, Equality Building and BCA Tas to ensure availability of appropriate and visually impaired accessible versions of the draft Bill and associated website information.

I appreciate your urgent consideration of these matters discussed above.

Kind regards,



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