



A4665120

Senator the Hon Carol Brown
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Accessibility of political party voting materials for people with disability

Following the Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters (JSCEM) hearing on 24 May 2024, I write to provide further commentary regarding the accessibility of candidate information, party advertising, and How to Vote cards. In my capacity as the Chair of the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC's) Disability Advisory Committee (DAC), I wish to share the perspectives put forward by our committee members from the disability sector.

For reference, the DAC has promoted greater accessibility, inclusion, and participation in the electoral process for people with disability for almost 20 years. Membership of the committee includes national disability peak bodies, disability representative organisations and state and territory electoral bodies.

At our latest committee meeting on 15 May 2024, committee members emphasised the critical importance of political parties and candidates offering electoral information in accessible formats for people with disability.

Specifically, the committee members highlighted the requirement for materials such as How to Vote cards to be translated into formats suitable for people who are blind or have low vision, as well as people who require information in easy-to-read formats. This initiative would empower people with disability to make well-informed decisions regarding their choice of candidates during elections.

AEC's commitment to accessible communications

The AEC is committed to greater equity of access to voting services. The Committee may find it useful to know the AEC offers the following to support voters on enrolling and voting:

- Easy Read guides on how to enrol and vote

- ReadSpeaker on the AEC website, which allows people with low literacy, people who are blind or have low vision, or people who have difficulty reading text online, to listen to information including information on how to vote
- videos which focus on oral explanation of topics such as what to expect at a polling place, how to access a postal vote, and ballot paper formality
- an education program for people who have a learning disability
- flipbooks at polling places providing simple ballot formality instructions
- Auslan video on the importance of enrolling to vote
- telephone voting for people who are blind or have low vision
- an Official Guide is sent to every household prior to a referendum or election and is available in large print, e-text, MP3 audio files/CD, DAISY and Braille.

For the 24/25 federal election, the AEC will maintain the use of text-to-speech pens and hearing loops in a polling place in every electoral division nationwide. Additionally, each polling place will offer access to a virtual Auslan interpreting service.

Conclusion

The AEC appreciates the opportunity to convey this information on behalf of the Disability Advisory Committee. The AEC has also written to the major political parties to ensure their awareness of the issue.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.



Jeff Pope

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