



Submission in Response to the Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 Exposure Draft

Introduction

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (commonly known and promoted in the community with its brand name “CASS”) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 Exposure Draft. As a long standing community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people from local communities and advocating on their behalf. Our submission is a reflection of the views and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who are significantly affected by Australia’s welfare measures.

About Our Organisation

CASS was founded in 1981. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the community, and assist migrants to settle and integrate into the Australian society. The comprehensive range of community services and activities provided by CASS include residential aged care, home ageing services, disability services, vocational training, settlement and health, volunteering, as well as family and children services. Most of the services we provide cover the whole of Metropolitan Sydney, with some covering areas down to Wollongong. We serve the Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese, people from other CALD communities, as well as mainstream Australians. At present, more than 2,600 families access our services and activities weekly.

Our response to the Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 Exposure Draft

We are pleased to see that amendments have been made to address the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee Advisory Report. In particular, we support the removal of the definition of political purpose, and the replacement of the definition of political expenditure with a new definition – electoral expenditure. This new definition, together with the definition of electoral matter, has narrowed down the scope of activities to only those with intent to influence the way electors vote in a federal election, including by promoting or

opposing parties, candidates, groups or parliamentarians. We are pleased that the definitional change ensures that non-political, issue-based advocacy is not captured. There are also clear carve-outs for communications with parliamentary committees, parliamentarians, other Commonwealth officials, political parties or candidates for federal elected office. Carve-outs also apply to private communications, news and editorial content, and for satirical, educative and artistic purposes. We strongly support these carve-outs and that they are explicitly stated in the amendments.

We also support the introduction of a single Transparency Register, and that the number of people and entities required to register is reduced through higher thresholds for political campaigners.

We believe the new amendments in the Exposure Draft will enable ‘genuine’ charities which have no interests in using donations from overseas to influence Australian elections to be able to continue expressing views on social issues on their client’s behalf without being considered as ‘political campaigners’.

While the amendments would see many charities deleted from the category of political campaigners, we believe many charities and businesses are not aware of their obligations under the Electoral Act 1918. We would like to see the Government adopt the JSCEM recommendation that ‘the Government appropriately resource both the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission to undertake a comprehensive campaign for business, for industry associations, and for the charity sector on their obligations under the Electoral Act 1918.’

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 Exposure Draft. We would appreciate if the Committee takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to have a further discussion to elaborate these viewpoints/concerns and we consent to our submission made public.

Anthony Pang
Deputy Chairperson /Secretary
CASS Group

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