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**Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation
Committee Inquiry into the National Integrity (Parliamentary Standards) Bill 2019**

This bill is obviously very important and urgently needed. The public trust and confidence in the integrity of the institutions of parliament, and of parliamentarians, is at an all-time low and seems to only be further deteriorating. This was evident in the 2019 Australian Election Survey of more than 2,100 Australians conducted by the Australian National University where just 25 per cent believed people in government could be trusted. This is the lowest level of trust since the post-election surveys of voters first began in 1960.

It is becoming increasingly clear that parliamentarians are unaware of their roles and responsibilities and community expectations and standards, or are simply incapable of satisfying them. Indeed during my nine years as a Member of Parliament I have seen deterioration in my colleagues' behaviour both in and out of the Parliament. A politician's key role is to represent and service their community but too often parliamentarians and their staff prioritise their own careers and personal gain over the needs of the voters.

The 46th Parliament has only been in place for eight months and already there have been serious questions about the integrity and conduct of several Senators and Members and their staff, including senior ministers. On 2 December 2019, I moved a motion in the Parliament about the behaviour of both major parties and their inability to deal with matters of ministerial integrity. This motion was supported by my cross-bench colleagues as well as the ALP.

I believe that this bill has been carefully drafted to strike a balance to maintain the protection of parliamentarians and their staffs' rights and privacy, while enabling solid procedures and penalties to deal with breaches in conduct and integrity. I strongly support the proposed independent roles of the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser and the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner. I have found the relevant departments are often reticent in providing clear advice regarding matters listed under section 25 of this bill and the function of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser would address this.

An independent Parliamentary Standards Commissioner is also essential given the demonstrated inability of the Parliament to deal with conduct and integrity matters, particularly those involving ministers. An independent body with clear procedures for investigation and reporting is markedly better than the slanging match and political point scoring that is evident in the handling of allegations surrounding a number of Senators and Members in recent times.

This bill is an important stepping stone to improving the Australian people's trust and satisfaction with the Parliament and their representatives, and it is even more important now that the Government could only propose a watered down version of a National Integrity Commission. This bill ensures that parliamentarians are made accountable for their actions and behaviour and provides clear processes when breaches occur. In my view this bill is well overdue.

Yours sincerely

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