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By your side

UNITED
**SERVICES
UNION**



1 October 2020

The Secretariat
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom it May Concern,

Re: Operation and Management of the Department of Parliamentary Services

We write on behalf of members of the United Services Union (USU), to make the following submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee's Inquiry into the Operation and Management of the Department of Parliamentary Services (the Department), and thank the Committee for the opportunity to do so. The USU welcomes the timely nature of this Inquiry, given the rapidly changing nature of the work undertaken by our members in the era of the COVID-19.

From the outset, USU would like to take this opportunity to express our members' appreciation for the work undertaken by Department staff, building attendants and the Parliamentary Library who assist them in their duties. USU members are broadly appreciative of the work of the Parliamentary Library; this is a critical resource for Parliamentarians and their offices and should be resourced to continue their excellent service.

The USU believes that the Department has a responsibility to ensure that our members' workplaces are fit for purpose and that Parliamentarians and their offices are adequately supported and resourced to ensure that our members can continue to do the important work that they are employed to undertake.

Even before COVID-19, it had become clear that our members' workplaces were not fit for purpose in the 21st Century. Issues surrounding internet connectivity and inadequate download/upload speeds, provided by the Department to our members' workplaces have a significant impact upon the work that is conducted in Parliamentarian's offices.

The Department's handling of the rollout of Windows 10/Office 365 in our members' workplaces has also been of concern. This process was disruptive and at times duplicative in nature and placed significant pressures on our members and their ability to perform their duties. Similarly, the Department's subsequent handling of IT outages, the provision of remote access and apparent cyber-attacks on the Parliament's computing network has been disruptive for our members.

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The very nature of our members' work has changed significantly in the 21st Century. Through technological advancements, it is now easier than ever for a constituent to contact their elected representatives, and thus the workload of our members has increased significantly.

Our members are required to perform their duties well outside of the realm of a typical 9am-5pm job and our members are increasingly reliant upon their own resources in order to perform their duties.

The USU is therefore of the opinion that it is critical that the Department re-evaluate the resourcing it provides to Parliamentarians through their IT Budgets.

This Budget ought to be reviewed, with adequate consideration into the fact that employees of Parliamentarians are often required to use their own personal internet, their own mobile phones and their own computers to perform their important duties. This comes at a significant personal cost to the individual employees. Increasing this Budget would allow Parliamentarians to more adequately equip their employees with the resources that are required to fulfil their roles.

The Department's handling of issues regarding IT through the '2020' division, is worthy of consideration through this Inquiry.

Our members often experience lengthy waits when raising a query with '2020'. This exacerbates the issue of members having to rely upon their own private resources to fulfil their duties, as their concerns can remain unresolved for periods of time. The USU is therefore of the belief that the Department ought to more adequately resource their IT division '2020' to support our members in their roles.

It has also become increasingly apparent that our members are not provided with adequate information communications technologies in their workplaces.

Now, more than ever, our members are reliant on video conferencing facilities and telecommunications to undertake their duties and the Union is of the belief that the Department is in a position to more adequately resource their workplaces, than is presently being done.

In terms of building management, the Department's handling of upgrades to Parliament House (namely entrances and elevators) has been lengthy and disruptive to our members. Our members work long hours and undertake diverse duties during Parliamentary Sittings; their workplaces should not be plagued with issues around accessibility.

The United Services Union has been concerned about an apparent lack of consultation that occurs on behalf of the Department with our members and would expect to see this improve moving forward. With a number of Parliamentarians directing their offices to transition to *Working from home* arrangements in recent months, it is imperative that the Department actively consider its responsibilities to support *MOPS Act* Employees in their ever changing workplaces.

The United Services Union thanks the Committee and the Secretariat for the opportunity to make this submission.

Our Union and its members would more than welcome the opportunity to provide further information to the Committee by appearing at one of its upcoming hearings, in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

Graeme Kelly OAM
General Secretary
MJ:tk

