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Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety  
Mr Jeremy Hanson CSC MLA, Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Mr Andrew Braddock MLA

Via email: [LACommitteeJCS@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:LACommitteeJCS@parliament.act.gov.au)

To the Committee Secretary,

### **Inquiry into Electoral Amendment Bill 2021**

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) welcomes the Electoral Amendment Bill 2021 and its aim to lower the minimum voting age to 16, and the voting enrolment age to 14. We are entirely supportive of empowering young people to actively participate in democratic processes.

ACTCOSS acknowledges Youth Coalition (YouthCo) as the peak body for youth workers and young people and endorses their submission to this Inquiry.

We echo sentiments that reducing the voting age would be of social benefit to the ACT and broader community. We find the rhetoric surrounding maintaining the current voting age insufficiently recognises the stake that young people have in present day policy making.

Further, common arguments made against reducing the voting age discriminatorily hold younger people to higher standards than the rest of the population. Responsibility and political knowledge are not compulsory criteria for voters over the age of 18 and there is no onus on adult voters to prove such responsibility or knowledge. Given that 16- and 17-year-olds can and often do hold adult responsibilities, such as employment and caring responsibilities, withholding the right to vote appears arbitrary and prejudicial.

However, we need to ensure that lowering the voting age does not have an unintended consequence for the campaign to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Please see YouthCo's submission for more detail on how to avoid this consequence.

Existing precedent in other countries demonstrates that lowering the voting age has carried no repercussions. Voting jurisdictions such as Austria, Brazil, Scotland and Wales have successfully implemented a voting age of 16 and faced absolutely no negative consequences from allowing young people to vote.

Research from other jurisdictions further demonstrates that reducing the voting age can have positive effects on society by increasing political engagement and interest. The Austrian case illuminated the increased situational and individual political interest of 16- and 17-year-olds following the lowering of the voting age to enfranchise young people.<sup>1</sup>

An additional benefit of involving young people in their democracy is the opportunity to further political education and media literacy in the school system. By offering young people a tangible way to engage with the political sphere, we can enable them to critically engage with media and news sources. As the most technologically equipped and engaged generation, the efforts of young people to identify and deconstruct fake news and misinformation makes them vital media literacy advocates.<sup>2</sup>

ACTCOSS strongly advocates for an equitable penalty system for not voting such that young people (particularly young people from low-income backgrounds) are not further disadvantaged. Fines should not only be capped at \$10, but alternatives such as community service should be explored to ensure equitable outcomes for those that cannot afford to pay.

ACTCOSS is happy to support the legislation lowering the voting age. For further discussion, please feel free to contact me on 0422036979, or via the email address below.

Yours sincerely



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<sup>1</sup> Zeglovits, E. and Zandonella, M., 2013. [Political interest of adolescents before and after lowering the voting age: the case of Austria](#). *Journal of Youth Studies*, [online] 16(8), pp.1084-1104. Available at:

<sup>2</sup> Lim, S. and Tan, K., 2020. [Front liners fighting fake news: global perspectives on mobilising young people as media literacy advocates](#). *Journal of Children and Media*, [online] 14(4), pp.529-535. Available at: