

Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No: 007
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Publication: Making the submission and your name public

I am writing as a private citizen to express strong opposition to the proposed bill. In particular, I am concerned about the disenfranchisement of incarcerated persons in our State. This is not a matter of "fairness"; it is a civil rights issue.

Firstly, if put into effect, the proposed bill will disproportionately disenfranchise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who are increasingly overrepresented in our State carceral system. According to the most recent ABS report, First Nations Queenslanders are imprisoned at a rate 10 times that of the general adult population, a rate which has increased by 6% in the past year. First Nations communities are more likely to be affected by compounding factors which increase the likelihood of arrest, incarceration, and recidivism; these include increased contact with law enforcement, poverty, disrupted kinship ties, homelessness, and substance abuse. We should be implementing policies which address these risk factors and promote community control and self determination, so that all Queenslanders have the support needed to avoid risk-taking behaviours and criminalisation. Instead, this policy would create a second class of citizens who do not enjoy the same basic rights, with the burden shared unequally along racial lines.

Secondly, as uncomfortable as it may be to acknowledge that incarcerated persons, including those convicted of violent crimes, should be treated as equal political actors, protecting their franchise rights is a necessary mechanism of State accountability. It is all too easy to justify voter disenfranchisement when believe that it will only burden the "bad ones" amongst us. However, the reality is that if that State has the power to create laws and policies which define criminality, AND has the power to disenfranchise citizens as a punishment for crime, then there is an easily exploitable loophole in democratic accountability. We cannot afford to construct a society in which the State has the power to create targeted laws which disenfranchise certain groups. The disenfranchisement of incarcerated persons is a matter of civil rights and basic democratic principles. The right to vote is the most fundamental political power we as citizens have. It must remain an inalienable right, or else we risk creating a political order in which the State has unchecked powers over its citizenry. Protect our democracy. Vote against this bill.