

Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No: 016

Submission By: [REDACTED]

Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name

1. Introduction

I make this submission to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee regarding the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill). I oppose the Bill in its current form.

Although improving electoral fairness and restoring public confidence in Queensland's electoral system are important objectives, several provisions of the Bill are likely to undermine democratic participation and weaken transparency. Rather than strengthening confidence, these measures risk eroding public trust.

2. Removal of Voting Rights for People Serving Sentences of One Year or More

The Bill proposes to disqualify people serving a term of imprisonment or detention of one year or more from voting in State elections, referendums, and local government elections.

Voting is a fundamental democratic right. Restricting this right based on sentence length creates a class of disenfranchised citizens and is inconsistent with the principle of universal suffrage.

This measure is particularly concerning because:

- It disproportionately affects already marginalised groups who are over-represented in the criminal justice system.
- It reduces civic engagement and rehabilitation opportunities for incarcerated people.
- It moves Queensland away from inclusive democratic norms adopted by many comparable jurisdictions.

Removing voting rights does not enhance electoral fairness. Rather, it weakens democratic participation and risks further disengagement from civic life.

3. Changes to Political Donation Rules

The Bill proposes significant changes to political donation arrangements, including:

- Applying donation caps on a financial-year basis rather than an election cycle basis; and
- Removing the prohibition on political donations from property developers and related industry bodies for State elections, while retaining the ban at the local government level.

Allowing property developers and related entities to donate to State election campaigns raises serious concerns about undue influence and public perception of fairness.

Property development is a sector with substantial financial interests in State government decisions, including planning, infrastructure, and housing policy.

Removing donation restrictions at the State level risks:

- Increasing the influence of well-resourced interest groups;
- Undermining the intent of previous reforms designed to improve integrity and transparency; and
- Eroding public confidence in political decision-making.

If the aim is to restore fairness, weakening donation restrictions for high-risk industries is counterproductive.

4. Use of Loans from Financial Institutions for Electoral Expenditure

The Bill proposes to allow loans from financial institutions to be used for electoral expenditure.

While loans are distinct from donations, they can function as a significant source of campaign funding and may create indirect influence or unequal access to resources.

This proposal risks:

- Circumventing donation caps in practice;
- Reducing transparency around campaign financing; and
- Providing an advantage to parties or candidates with greater access to finance.

Electoral fairness relies on a level playing field and clear, transparent funding arrangements. Introducing additional funding mechanisms, without robust safeguards, risks undermining these principles.

5. Reduced Oversight of Party Preselection and Election Material Authorisation

The Bill seeks to increase the independence of registered political parties in conducting preselection ballots by removing Electoral Commission of Queensland oversight. It also amends authorisation requirements for election materials, including allowing the use of post office boxes. Independent oversight plays a critical role in maintaining confidence in electoral processes.

Reducing oversight may:

- Decrease transparency within political parties;
- Increase the risk of internal disputes or unfair practices; and
- Weaken accountability for election communications.

Clear and robust authorisation requirements for election materials are essential to prevent voter confusion and misinformation. Any reduction in these standards risks diminishing public trust.

6. Overall Impact on Electoral Integrity and Public Confidence

Taken together, the measures in this Bill are unlikely to achieve their stated aim of restoring electoral fairness.

The combined effect of:

- Restricting voting rights,
- Weakening political donation safeguards,
- Introducing new funding mechanisms, and
- Reducing independent oversight,

is likely to reduce confidence in the integrity and fairness of Queensland's electoral system.

Electoral reform should prioritise inclusion, transparency, and accountability.

In its current form, the Bill does not adequately meet these objectives.

7. Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend that the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025 not be passed in its current form.

I encourage the Committee to consider reforms that:

- Protect universal voting rights;
- Strengthen, rather than weaken, political donation restrictions;
- Enhance transparency in campaign funding; and
- Maintain strong, independent oversight of electoral processes.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.