



Speech By  
**Terry James**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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## **ELECTORAL LAWS (RESTORING ELECTORIAL FAIRNESS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr JAMES** (Mulgrave—LNP) (5.14 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025—a comprehensive legislation package that represents our commitment to strengthening Queensland’s democracy. The bill is not merely a set of technical amendments; it is a step towards restoring fairness, enhancing transparency and, most importantly, rebuilding public trust in the way Queenslanders elect their representatives.

The principal aim of this bill is to ensure that every Queenslander can participate in our electoral system confidently and equitably. The reforms outlined seek to create a level playing field for all participants in state elections, reinforce the integrity of campaign funding and clarify the rules that govern our democratic processes. Through these changes, we are moving from aspirational ideals to tangible realities, where fairness and transparency are embodied in every aspect of our elections.

A cornerstone of this bill is the repeal of the ban on political donations from property developers for state elections. This reform is a direct response to the Crisafulli government’s election commitment, ensuring that donation rules are applied consistently and without favour. Under the new provisions, both trade unions and property developers will be eligible to contribute to state election campaigns, thereby eliminating the previous imbalance that favoured certain groups over others.

As articulated by Premier David Crisafulli during the second leaders’ debate on 16 October 2024, this measure corrects what was described as ‘an electoral financial gerrymander’ under the former government—a system that imposed special rules for some while discriminating against others. Our position could not be clearer: there should be one rule for all or none for anyone. This principle was endorsed by Queenslanders at the ballot box, reflecting widespread support for even-handedness and genuine democratic equality.

The bill also addresses the complex and sensitive issue of prisoner voting rights. In line with our commitment to prioritise victims and uphold community expectations, the bill removes the right to vote in state and local government elections, as well as referendums, for individuals serving sentences of imprisonment or detention for one year or more. This reform is grounded in the belief that those who have committed serious offences should not have the privilege of electing lawmakers while serving their sentences.

The previous government’s 2019 reforms allowed prisoners serving less than three years to vote, citing human rights considerations. However, our government believes parliament has the authority—affirmed by the High Court’s decision in *Roach v Electoral Commissioner*—to determine which offences are serious enough to warrant temporary loss of voting rights. Offences attracting sentences of one year or more such as burglary, assault and sexual offences are sufficiently grave to justify this restriction. This reform not only stands up for victims but also reinforces respect for the law and the seriousness of criminal conduct.

Another important reform is the allowance for loans from regulated financial institutions to be paid into state campaign accounts. Previously, candidates and parties were limited to borrowing from individuals or private lenders, often unregulated and occasionally risky. This system made campaign finance dependent on wealthy backers or sources lacking transparency and regulation. By enabling the use of reputable and regulated financial institutions, this bill reduces reliance on potentially unscrupulous lenders and supports a more transparent, accountable system for financing electoral expenditure. This change is vital for ensuring campaign funds are sourced responsibly and are subject to robust oversight.

This bill reforms donation cap periods by aligning them with the financial year, mirroring practices in New South Wales and at the Commonwealth level. While the cap amounts remain unchanged, this adjustment simplifies the regulatory framework, making it easier for donors and campaign participants to comply with the law. Annualising donation caps maintains safeguards against corruption while enabling legitimate support for electoral campaigns. This reform ensures fairness, clarity and consistency for all involved in the democratic process.

The bill also repeals the requirement for the Electoral Commission of Queensland to oversee and audit party preselection ballots. Registered political parties will now conduct their own preselection processes in accordance with their constitutions, free from external oversight. This measure reduces unnecessary administrative burdens and brings Queensland into alignment with other states and the Commonwealth, where electoral commissions do not intervene in internal party matters. This reform is intended to enhance the independence of political parties and encourage the democratic selection of candidates, removing outdated provisions that have become barriers to participation and were originally introduced to address specific issues within the Labor Party.

The bill extends the requirement for authorisation of electoral materials and how-to-vote cards from the traditional 28-day campaign period to the full 12 months preceding an ordinary general election. This reform will increase transparency and public awareness about the sources of electoral materials, ensuring that Queenslanders are informed well ahead of polling day. Additionally, the bill allows candidates to use post-office boxes or other prescribed addresses for authorisation purposes, addressing privacy and safety concerns for those involved in the electoral process. These changes promote accountability, protect candidate privacy and ensure Queenslanders are better informed about political advertising.

The Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025 is a comprehensive package of reforms that will make our electoral system fairer, more transparent and more trustworthy. It honours our commitments, responds to community expectations and brings Queensland's laws into alignment with best practice across Australia. These reforms are not only about modernising our electoral laws but also about reaffirming our shared values of integrity, fairness and respect for democratic principles. Together, let us ensure that Queensland democracy remains robust, accessible and fair to all. By passing this bill we will send a clear message to the people of Queensland, and indeed to all Australians, that our democracy is built on solid foundations and that we are committed to protecting and strengthening those foundations for generations to come. I commend the bill to the House.