

25 January 2018

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017

UnitingCare Australia is pleased to provide this submission to the Inquiry. We note that the stated purpose of the Bill is to introduce new measures to improve transparency and accountability in relation to **political donations**, so that foreign or other hidden influences intended to subvert the democratic process can be identified and counteracted.

We believe that the Bill will not only be ineffective in achieving this aim, but will itself pose a threat to the democratic process by inappropriately classifying as 'political donations' the funding of welfare and other public interest advocacy that in fact contributes to robust and informed debate and decision-making. It is noteworthy that the Bill would not address 'membership fees' that secure access to Government decision-makers in specially convened fora, for those groups and individuals pursuing vested interest advocacy.

The activities of organisations such as ours that carry out advocacy designed to extend the benefits and opportunities of life in Australia to all, regardless of their circumstances, are currently well regulated in this country. We do not seek to promote the election of individuals or parties.

It is thus not appropriate that our advocacy fall within the purview of legislation governing donations to elections.

Further, the Bill as it is currently formulated will add significant administrative burden, compliance cost and red tape to our activities, thus diverting resources from the important task of bringing the voices, issues and concerns of people in the communities we serve to the policy-making process.

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UnitingCare Australia represents one of the largest networks of community services across the country. Our advocacy is informed by these services and the people we serve. A guiding principle of UnitingCare Australia is that decision making on national policy must operate in a truly democratic way, involving and empowering the greatest number of people through working cooperatively and ecumenically. We support transparency and accountability including sharing information with the public and community on the impacts of policy and processes on the most vulnerable in our society.

UnitingCare Australia reiterates its concern regarding the provisions of the Bill and supports the concerns echoed by other organisations in the sector, including Anglicare Australia and St Vincent de Paul Society, which recommend the Bill be withdrawn.

We would welcome the opportunity to clarify or comment further on any of the issues raised in this submission.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claerwen Little".

Claerwen Little
National Director
UnitingCare Australia