

Expert Reference Group on the Size of the Assembly
C/- Elections
ACT PO Box 272
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608
SizeOfAssemblyInquiry@act.gov.au

Dear Members of the Expert Reference Group on the Size of the Assembly,

Please accept this short submission from the YWCA of Canberra regarding the size of the Assembly.

The YWCA of Canberra strongly supports the right of citizens of the ACT to participate in the democratic process of electing a Legislative Assembly to govern the Territory. The Organisation is proud to be part of a jurisdiction that has an innovative arrangement where both State and Local Government activities are undertaken by the Legislature .

The YWCA of Canberra works closely with members of the Assembly and appreciates the strong community connection that the Legislative Assembly has. We value the level of access this enables for organisations like ourselves to participate in the democratic process.

We also recognise the responsibilities and role we have in supporting members of the community to access their democratic rights. We are active in encouraging members to vote in elections and cast an informed vote.

The YWCA of Canberra believes there is a strong case to expand the size of the Legislative Assembly. Working closely with Ministers and other members of the Assembly, we are well aware of the heavy workloads, diverse portfolio areas and the competing demands that this creates. Independent of how committed and professional individual members of the Assembly are, it is our experience at times that this results in less than perfect governing. It is important that the structure and size of the Legislative Assembly is determined by the needs of the community and is then adequately resourced, rather than the financial costs of decisions driving the decision making process. The information provided within the discussion paper makes a strong case for the argument that the ACT is in fact under represented in its Legislature. We would urge recommendations look at the evidence of need rather than merely weighing up the financial costs of particular models.

A key advocacy priority of the YWCA of Canberra is to see the equal representation of women in political decision making. Around the world this is recognised as a key issue. In a 2007 Report UNICEF reported that the under-representation of women at the ministerial level and in local government is even more marked than in national legislatures¹.

¹ 2007 UNICEF: Report The State of the World's Children: Women and Children, the Double Dividend of Gender Equity http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/profiles/inequality_politics.php

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The YWCA of Canberra is particularly concerned that there are impacts on the gender balance of the Legislative Assembly that flow from being significantly under represented. The experience of the ACT Legislative Assembly supports a suggestion that a smaller Assembly can have a negative impact on the equal participation of women in political decision making processes. While the gender balance in the Legislative Assembly is currently fair (recognising that this is variable across the political parties), at times there has been a significant under representation of women in the Legislative Assembly. In addition, when reflecting on the most recent election, it is the case that a number of female candidates with significant primary vote allocations were unsuccessful in their bid to either join or remain in the ACT Legislative Assembly while their male counterparts were ultimately elected to the Assembly.

In a smaller Legislative Assembly the ability to represent the diversity of the community is much less likely, with fewer opportunities for citizens to participate in political decision making. While there has been some diversity in our Legislative Assembly, there is a predominance of particular social economic and demographic attributes.

As such, the YWCA of Canberra supports the enlargement of the Legislative Assembly to better reflect our growing population and ensure that we get a legislature that is able to appropriately govern and make this community a great place to live.

If you require any further detail, I would be happy to be contacted on 6175 9900.

Yours sincerely



Rebecca Vassarotti
Executive Director

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