

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Melbourne – Monday 27 November 2023

MEMBERS

Luba Grigorovitch – Chair

Wayne Farnham – Deputy Chair

Brad Battin

David Ettershank

Sam Hibbins

Emma Kealy

Nathan Lambert

Lee Tarlamis

Emma Vulin

WITNESSES *(via videoconference)*

Helen Williams, Chief Executive Officer, and

Nathan Despott, Head, Policy, Research and Advocacy, Inclusion Melbourne;

Cameron Bloomfield, Peer Leader, Rainbow Rights and Advocacy; and

Dr Paul Ramcharan, Senior Research Fellow, University of Melbourne.

The CHAIR: I declare open the public hearings for the Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election. All mobile phones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands each of us is gathered on today, and pay my respect to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I am Luba Grigorovitch, and I am the Chair of this committee and the Member for Kororoit. The other members that I have here today are Wayne Farnham, who is my Deputy Chair and the Member for Narracan; we have got Emma Vulin, who is the Member for Pakenham; and Nathan Lambert, who is the Member for Preston. Online we have got Lee Tarlamis, who is a Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. I believe that the Member for Berwick, Brad Battin, will also be joining us shortly, so when he comes online, I will make sure I properly introduce him.

I welcome each of you and thank you so much for being here today. All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including in social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible as well.

Now, I do not believe we have any media present today, so I will skip over that. We have got another committee member, David Ettershank, who is a Member for Western Metropolitan. So, David, give us a wave. He is here as well today, so welcome.

We have invited each of you – the four of you that are there – to talk particularly about the Political Inclusion National Summit, and I would like to ask you to begin by providing a summary of the findings and recommendations of that summit, which will be followed by questions from the committee. I will now hand it over to you. Who would like to go first?

Nathan DESPOTT: Thanks, everyone. I am happy to go first. I am Nathan Despott, the Head of Policy, Research and Advocacy. I actually have slides to share if that is okay.

The CHAIR: That is definitely okay, but I am no tech genius so I will pass it over to someone who is.

Nathan DESPOTT: That is okay. I can share my screen.

The CHAIR: There we go.

Visual presentation.

Nathan DESPOTT: I understand that you have already acknowledged country, but I would like to start by acknowledging that those of us from our team with you today are on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people. We acknowledge them as the traditional owners of the lands we are meeting on, and we also acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to elders past and present and to any First Nations people who might be joining us today.

Those of us here today are Dr Paul Ramcharan from the University of Melbourne; Helen Williams, the CEO of Inclusion Melbourne; I am the Head of Policy, Research and Advocacy at Inclusion Melbourne; and Cameron Bloomfield, who is a peer worker at Rainbow Rights and Advocacy. We represent I guess a leading partnership of organisations, researchers and systemic advocates in the political inclusion of people with intellectual and cognitive disability over roughly the last 10 years.

The journey, as we shared very briefly in an earlier hearing, that we have been on is a period of global investigation between 2013 and 2017, running our first pilot of the I Can Vote project in 2018 and running the political inclusion Victorian roundtables in 2021 with leading advocacy and support organisations, commissioners and a range of other key people in Victoria, running the 2022 state election I Can Vote campaign and then just recently the Political Inclusion National Summit. We are now looking towards work on the national scale and also at the state level.

In 2016 and 2017 we were commissioned by the VEC to develop some resources. The first one was a report called *Electoral Inclusion*, which was a guide to global best practice projects in supporting the enfranchisement of people with cognitive and intellectual disability, now followed by a dual read guide which combines the key areas of support practice into a simple visual tool for supporters of people with disability and people with intellectual disabilities themselves. Obviously it could not include partisan content, because it was funded by the VEC, but it did include a guide to using supported decision-making and active support. Then the third resource was a plan-to-vote form, which is really a proof of concept mapping out the support process in the six months before an election if you are supporting a person with intellectual disability. Much of our work since then has really been based on the ideas that are in these guides.

Essentially what we have found over the years, if I can sum it up into one diagram, as you can see on the screen there, is that the vast bulk of people with intellectual and cognitive disability that we have worked with over the years in their early years have experienced and been subject to the low expectations and assumptions of low capacity in relation to many areas of life but in particular the ability to learn about politics, to have political conversations and to understand political ideas. Sometimes the assumptions might be based on the person's higher support needs. Maybe they are a non-verbal communicator, maybe they have got other support needs that seem to drown out education and learning, but either way these low expectations and assumptions are very present. What we have found is that the vast majority of the time, and people that have been involved in our project have also found, they are not valid assumptions and expectations, but as you will see, they can become self-fulfilling prophecies in some really dark ways. This usually leads to then substantially fewer opportunities for everyday political conversations and opportunities for political learning, particularly in school, and then it also leads to a reduced impetus for people with intellectual disability to ask political questions or to view the world around them in political terms in ways that many of us, even if we do not realise it, probably did in our younger years or even in our teen years.

What we then have is no real formal requirement in our education system for that extra bit of support for people with intellectual and cognitive disability to build their skills and learning around political and civic engagement and awareness. Often there might be a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy in the case of people with intellectual and cognitive disability, which often seems to take precedence over civic learning. Particularly in special schools, regardless of what rhetoric might be out there, it is almost universal across the hundreds of people that we support at Inclusion Melbourne and many others involved in our project that the ability to have those conversations and learn about politics, particularly conversations and learning about parties and different political ideologies, is not really built into the system at all.

There is no meaningful practice guidance for teachers, supporters, NDIS providers regarding addressing this lack of inclusion in political communication and learning. Then on top of this, we have substantial hesitation on the part of support workers and carers due to concerns about being impartial, leading people, being seen as maybe having a second vote if they support someone to vote, and the fear of having undue influence in the daily support process. What this leads to is the appearance of people with intellectual and cognitive disability having a lack of ability to understand political issues, having a lack of engagement with the real world and real-

world politics and also the view that supporting people with cognitive disability to vote will damage our democracy. If these things sound pretty extreme in terms of articulated assumptions, we have heard them articulated to us many times over many years.

I was going to, before moving on to some of the solutions, quickly talk about some of the perceived primary barriers. When we started doing this project work years ago, in the area of advocacy around political inclusion it seemed very much that those professionals and advocates working on this problem viewed it in some ways as primarily a legal problem. They also saw it as a problem relating specifically to the act of voting in elections. So all that information I have shared relating to lack of opportunities for political learning and conversation was not really centred in advocacy. Things that were focused on were difficulty of getting on the roll; dealing with the unsound mind, or unsoundness of mind, clauses in electoral legislation; the issue of being removed from the roll – if the form was filled out for the electoral commissions by another voter and by a medical professional, that was seen as a major problem, which it still is; and then also voters with an intellectual disability not knowing what to do on election day, so not knowing how to fill out the ballot paper or that kind of thing. What we eventually found is that these problems being viewed as the main barriers is in itself a barrier, because these are actually not the main barriers to the inclusion of people with intellectual disability, but they do get an awful lot of attention.

Cameron, who is with us, I am going to call into action. Cam, I wanted to ask if you could briefly describe your experience as a self-advocate and your involvement with the I Can Vote project and as a voter.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: Yes. When I first started to vote it was very hard and complicated because I did not know what to do or who to vote for or how to read all the information that was given to me, because it was hard to read. Then many, many years later I got involved with Nathan and the I Can Vote team, which spoke to politicians about doing their stuff in easy English so people like me, who have an intellectual disability, can understand all the jargon that politicians say. What was the third question you asked, Nathan?

Nathan DESPOTT: I was going to ask what your experience is as a self-advocate and also how you learned about politics.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: How I learned about politics was by talking to people. I talked to Nathan, and I talked to other people in my close circle, and that is how I managed to learn about politics. About my self-advocacy journey, I started off being just a normal member of Rainbow Rights. I became a peer leader, and I also did a little course with the Voice at the Table team on how to learn to speak up for yourself. Now I feel comfortable pulling anyone up if they use any jargon words or if there is something that I do not understand. But I have done a lot of other work as well. I was interviewed by the ABC for a dentistry project that I was working on with Nathan. If you search up my name, Cameron Bloomfield, you will actually see me on the ABC. There are a few videos lurking around there. Anything else, Nathan?

Nathan DESPOTT: No, that is great. Thanks, Cam.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: You are welcome.

Nathan DESPOTT: So the barriers – and again, Paul and I shared these in our previous meeting, so I will not touch on them in too much depth – that have emerged through our project work, and certainly through the Political Inclusion National Summit that was held a few months ago, are that, quite simply, there is not enough support for people with cognitive disability to learn about politics. It is important to understand that we are saying to learn about politics, not necessarily learning about voting in and of itself. There is not enough support to help people to learn to make decisions, particularly the application of supported decision-making to this area of learning. Many of the risks associated with political education and helping people with intellectual disability learn about different parties is grounded in this idea that it is not possible to deliver any form of group learning, individual learning or education of people with cognitive disability that involves information about, for example, the different parties, without passing on your own political bias. Whereas accepted and new models of supported decision-making would say that it is possible to deliver that kind of education and maintain impartiality, and that it is indeed the right of people with intellectual disability to have that kind of education. It was endorsed at our summit by Ro Allen, the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner, that the right to vote in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, insofar as it involves people with intellectual and cognitive disability, is also presupposed by a deeper right to be supported to learn about

politics. What we have established in essence is that Victoria and many other governments have, in many ways, most likely inadvertently, failed to act on and realise that right. In Victoria we have already affirmed supported decision-making in our updated guardianship legislation. This is already a model that is part of the law of the land in Victoria.

The third barrier that emerged is that too many people think that people with intellectual disability cannot learn about politics and voting. The fourth barrier that was most commonly raised is that political culture is not cognitively inclusive enough. And the fifth is that there is not enough information about politics and parties and elections that people with disability can access and understand.

What I was going to do quickly is turn to our CEO Helen Williams and ask Helen to describe a little bit of her own personal journey and experience, and then to introduce the I Can Vote website.

Helen WILLIAMS: Thank you, Nathan. My eldest son Harrison, who is 26, has an intellectual disability. Harrison was lucky enough with the special school that he went to that they did give them the opportunity to learn about politics and what it meant to vote and gave them the skills to understand and who to talk to within their supportive network around the elections that were happening in their local area. So from when Harrison turned 18, he was very curious about asking questions to my husband and I about the process and about the people in our local area that he was voting for, whether at a state or federal level, and he has managed to make his own decisions, which are usually not in alignment with ours because we do not influence that. It is really good to see his curiosity and his appetite to want to learn more and to ask questions and to ask questions of different people in his community he feels supported with to be able to understand that further. He feels a very important part of the process. He knows exactly when the day is to vote and a month ahead reminds us every single day that we cannot forget. We need to turn up and be there. He has been enabled by his supported decision-making and his community and circles of support to be able to participate in that process and feels very much validated that his vote is just as important as everybody else's.

I found this with the work that I was doing prior to this role with Jobbank and working with priority cohorts and vulnerable people across the board, not just people with disability, in being able to have this opportunity to be able to understand and particularly that ability to have the equal opportunity to learn about it and being able to understand it so that they can make an informed decision to support who they would like.

Nathan DESPOTT: Thanks, Helen. Just quickly before I go to our last presenter, Paul Ramcharan from the University of Melbourne, Inclusion Melbourne, as some of you may be aware, has run the I Can Vote project for a number of years, which is essentially a realisation and bringing together of the techniques that we saw in our global investigation period. It has allowed at the last two state elections political candidates to develop an easy-language video with support from our team and to place this on the I Can Vote website for people with intellectual and cognitive disability to access to be able to compare apples and apples, as it were. It brings together cognitively accessible political information, political education, planning materials, direct support practice guidance and logistical support tips so that people with intellectual disability and their supporters can be empowered to engage and prepare for elections.

In the most recent campaign, in 2022, we aimed for each party, at least the larger parties, to create a video, and as many independent candidates as possible. The videos started out with a script that was sent to us by a party representative, translated into easy language by our team and then filmed and captioned, with an Auslan window added in, and these were hosted on the website. The total cost for these – easy language translation, filming and production, and Auslan – was less than \$300, thanks to partner pro bono work. We already had at least 100,000 video views from the 2018 campaign, so you would have thought that there would be a lot of interest in 2022. We did have videos from six of the larger parties, but one of the larger parties declined to be involved in this project and to produce a video, even though we did most of the work and a huge amount of translation. But at least, I guess, we have now this really powerful model as a proof of concept.

I will now ask Paul Ramcharan to just give his thoughts coming from the findings of the Political Inclusion National Summit in 2023 and also to provide some of his comments about education before we hand back to the committee for questions.

Paul RAMCHARAN: Thank you very much, Nathan, and thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this session. A couple of observations: in the Political Inclusion National Summit we had people who were not able

to communicate verbally who over the years have nevertheless managed to engage with their local communities, become concerned about the things that were going on in their communities and more widely in the state and perhaps even nationally; who had been supported in their decision-making and their interests, which each and every one of the Victorian population have; and who on that basis were able to learn more in order to become more politicised and to make a decision then about casting a vote. So that is the first thing. The evidence is then that in 2022, as in most elections previously, if not all, there are a disproportionately large number of people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities who are not voting, who have the capacity to vote but are not supported to do so. So that is just the first point I would like to make.

The second point I would very much like to make is that in the Political Inclusion National Summit we also had a number of presentations from Canada, from Britain, from Sweden and from other places as well in which we were presented with innovative solutions for training, for education and for peer learning, and so we are not coming just with a series of problems but also with quite a number of different solutions, which will actually address the issues and the problems that we have presented this morning.

The third thing I want to just note is that there is what I would consider to be a double discrimination going on. In the first place people who become isolated are not engaged in their communities, are not educated and are disadvantaged in their capacity to understand and develop their ideas about what is important in relation to politics and to voting, and they are often disadvantaged because the education system does not have the correct standards and because the issues around implementation of the human rights Acts and legislation, which Nathan has referred to, are not engaged sufficiently. Having been disadvantaged there, again a function of something else that Nathan pointed out, which is that there are low expectations of people with cognitive disability, we then have people being removed from the register. We have electoral Acts which use capacity and people's intellectual capabilities as something against them when the system itself has developed exclusive practices which lead up to that in the first place. So it is a vicious cycle and circle in which people are disadvantaged from becoming full citizens and then disadvantaged by not being recognised as full citizens, and those things really need to be addressed.

Just in relation to – final point – education, we need to understand I think that the work that the VEC and other bodies do in trying to support people to participate in elections is framed for the population as a whole. It is like a central tendency. So all of the things that are put in place do not necessarily address the issues that we have been talking about here, which are: how are people included in their communities? How do people get educated over time in relation to politics and voting? How do they get politicised? What support do they then need to actually cast a vote? We have many examples which show this can be done, and therefore it should be done. If not, then we are really in some ways harming the democracy of Victoria and the capacity of people with cognitive disability to have a voice in democratic decision-making. I will rest it there, but those are the main points I would like to make.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. Nathan, does that conclude your presentation or is there still a little more to go?

Nathan DESPOTT: Just on the screen now there are three steps for actions that as a team and as a larger project partnership we put together for our meeting with you today, which are three I guess actions, suggestions, wishes, dreams that will be quite doable that we would like to put before the Electoral Matters Committee – bearing in mind that in our analysis of the various instruments and bodies in Victoria, the EMC is possibly the only one that sits at the intersection of having the capability to support this kind of enfranchisement without going to some of those areas of risk. For example, the VEC is not able to engage with projects that handle the learning of or education around politically partisan content. Bearing in mind that a government while in government is still a party in government, and usually, as we have seen around the world, cannot be seen to be driving enfranchisement of people with intellectual disability through political education. It usually needs to be representatives from a range of different parties that are involved in this kind of work, as we have seen in the UK and Canada. I guess we have come to the EMC with that sort of responsibility that we see your committee has, and we wanted to present to you these three suggested actions: the first is a concept for a parliamentary motion, the second is the concept of a scoping project and the third is the enablement of required materials and systems. Obviously the third is more of a resourcing issue, but the first two are ideas we would like to play with with you. I will leave it at that for now.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you, Nathan, and thank you all so much for that presentation. Look, I know myself I found that incredibly informative. Emma and I were chatting just before the meeting, and we said that we are so keen to get as much information from you guys – and I well and truly feel like I have got plenty, so thank you.

I will just kick it off with one or two questions that I have got, and then I am mindful (1) of the time but (2) I know my colleagues are very keen to ask some questions as well. So first of all, those three actions at the end were fantastic. Thank you very much for simplifying that. That will give us something definitely to chat about. Just one question I had was: during the presentation you said with the I Can Vote there was only one larger party who declined to participate in that. Who was that, just out of interest?

Nathan DESPOTT: I can clarify. That was the Liberal Party, and that was a situation where our process that we have developed, which is somewhat refined considering it was the second time we have run a campaign, usually saw us receive text from a party representative. We translated it and sent it back; they approved it. We connected them up with the filming partner, which was Channel 31, and they prepared a studio. And then the booking was never fulfilled by the Liberal Party, so it did not go through. So we actually had the easy language translated script, but it was never filmed.

The CHAIR: Okay. That is great to know. Thank you. It is clear that all of you have gone to a lot of effort to ensure that there is inclusion there, so thank you. Helen, I loved your little story about your son having a different view but still getting very involved. Anyway, I have got plenty to ask, but I am mindful that my colleagues are keen too, so I will kick it off with my Deputy Chair. Did you want to –

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, I do want to ask a question. Thank you for your presentation. It was very informative. I will do a couple of quickfire questions. One, who makes the decision on whether someone can vote or not? That is something I am very keen to find out, and the other one is: do you think carers of people with disability can influence their vote in the election if the person with the disability does not quite understand what is going on?

The CHAIR: Who would like to answer that one?

Wayne FARNHAM: Anyone can answer it.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: I will give it a shot for you.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thanks, Cam.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: As someone with lived experience myself, sometimes some carers, some guardians and that can influence the person with disability, because most times people with disabilities normally do what someone else says. And especially if they do not know what they are talking about, they could easily just say ‘Hey, look, just vote for this party’ or ‘Vote for that party,’ even though they maybe do not know who they are voting for or why they are voting for them – so people with disabilities can be lured into voting for somebody if they do not know what is going on.

Nathan DESPOTT: And I might add to that, to go to your question around who decides, I think that is exactly the question, because I think if you come from the perspective as if there are these two distinct groups in our society of people who have an intellectual impairment and people who do not, and we look at that category of people with an intellectual disability as being in a separate box, then we might think about all these rules and risks around the high risk of people influencing their decisions and that kind of thing, but that is actually not how society is structured. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is embedded in a lot of the aspects of disability support practice that are actually part of many of our state instruments – supported decision-making is one – if I could paraphrase that UN article, says that no-one has the right to decide on someone’s legal capacity on the basis of their subjective perception of that person’s intellectual or mental capacity.

We have guardianship legislation where we are moving towards a model of having supportive power of attorney, rather than some of the more complete uses of the power of attorney that we have had in the past. So essentially in Victoria and really in Australia it is not really a thing anymore where one can or should make decisions about another person’s capacity. It might functionally happen, but it is not really something that there

is a legal avenue towards anymore. It is more about the issue of, 'Have we applied supported decision-making? Has the person been empowered appropriately?' I know this might sound very grey and a bit murky, but I think that the reality is that it has been murky, and it is because of that appearance of murkiness that this area of enfranchisement has been avoided in the past. What we are seeing, though, is that if a person is given the opportunity to learn a little bit about politics, do a bit of group learning and have the right support, then they are far less likely to have these isolated incidents in a vacuum happening like what Cam was mentioning, where you have got a person who just has one person talking to them about politics and that one person is leading them. In many ways it is more of a ground for adding better support, rather than removing support. Paul?

Paul RAMCHARAN: Yes, I just wanted to reinforce that point in answer to the question. All of us make our decisions about who to vote for based on our experiences, our networks, our engagement with the community and our understanding of the world. Cameron has made the case quite powerfully that if there is one person only engaged with another, they may exert influence, but if a person, like all of us, has a sufficient number of contacts, engagements, peer group contacts and experiences, then they are more likely to be able to form their own view about what decision they take. If supported decision-making and the right learning is in place, then they are able to make their decisions independently. So I think it is really important not to come from the perspective of, 'Oh, there might be undue influence.' All of us are influenced. The question is: have we got sufficient resources behind us to be able to counter that and come to our own decision? To start off with the notion of undue influence is to discriminate from the premise that you argue from, and we can do something about that.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much for all of those contributions. Nathan, I know you have got a question.

Nathan LAMBERT: Thank you, Chair. I might just sort of follow up on the Member for Narracan's questions and also on some stuff that we discussed back in August. Look, taking your point, Paul, but just to go to this very specific matter, you say that thousands of people are removed from the roll due to unsoundness-of-mind judgements, and I think this is where the Member for Narracan was going: who is instigating those actions to have people removed? And I suppose a second question from me: are they keeping paperwork, if you like, such that we would know the exact number of people that have been removed from the Victorian roll?

Wayne FARNHAM: Good question.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: To answer that question, I will give you a little bit of background. Years ago when I was engaged to someone who also had a disability, there was a letter sent to the electoral commission asking for her to be taken off the vote because she did not know how to vote or was incapacitated. She had an intellectual disability, but she did not know what to do so her guardian asked for her to be removed from the list. Then they just removed her without even asking questions.

Nathan LAMBERT: And you think, Cam, that it is usually the guardian or carer that initiates that letter?

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: That is – from my experience, as far as I know. It is normally the guardian or carer who can issue the letter to the electoral commission. Then without even following it up they will just, as far as I know, remove them so they do not have to vote. It is like they are put in the too-hard basket instead of following it up.

Nathan DESPOTT: I might jump in and say there is a form that is filled out and the person does have a period of time to challenge the form that has been sent in. But, yes, essentially it is usually a carer, guardian, family member that does that. I should follow that up by saying that there are many people that have been through the I Can Vote project and there have been some over the years – more than I actually really expected, to be honest – who have said that they were in a situation where they had been removed from the roll and it was only when they challenged that and said, 'Hey, I want to vote. Why have I been removed from the roll?' that then they have re-enrolled.

Nathan LAMBERT: I am very conscious that we are running low on time.

The CHAIR: Mr Ettershank has got one too.

Nathan LAMBERT: Maybe if there is just any possibility that you can provide any more concrete details about exactly what that process looks like – as I say, who initiates it? Who does the assessments? I think that would just be helpful to our thinking. Thank you all for your advocacy, but I will throw back to you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Lambert. Mr Ettershank has texted me to say that he has got something to raise. So I might hand it over there.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Firstly, thank you to the panel members for your presentation. It was outstanding. It was really appreciated, and you have obviously put a lot of time into it. I think I am probably on the same page as Mr Lambert, figuratively as well as literally, in saying that I would like to see a worked-up document of the proposal that was in your last slide. On the face of it, it looks terrific, but it would be fantastic if we could have some more detail. I would certainly be and I am sure many of the other committee members would be keen to pursue it further.

The CHAIR: Look, I definitely think that would be a great proposal, so thank you very much for saying that. As I alluded to earlier, having those three points at the end is really helpful. A lot of people come here with problems but not solutions, so thank you so much for putting your wish list forward. I am mindful of time, so if there are no other burning questions, I might wrap it up there. Is there anything that you wanted to say in finalisation before we conclude?

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: I would like to add one thing.

The CHAIR: Please, Cameron.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: Is there a possibility, Chair, that we can maybe organise to meet at another point in time so we can talk more in detail about what we do with the project that we are working on at the moment?

The CHAIR: That is a great request. We have a number of submissions and a number of people that we are interviewing, but I know that some committee members have got some real interest in this, so I think we might take that question offline, if that is all right, Cameron. We will definitely, as per Mr Ettershank and Mr Lambert's suggestion, get a bit of a briefing paper. I am sure we will be in touch with probably Nathan or Helen to make sure that that work happens, and if there are further questions, we will definitely reach out to you. Thank you for making that offer.

Cameron BLOOMFIELD: Thank you.

Nathan DESPOTT: I just want to answer quickly in relation to the question about people being removed from the roll. As I mentioned in our presentation, there was a time when we kept really abreast of all those details and stats, particularly in communication with the VEC. We can provide a formal response to that, but I guess I wanted to reiterate that our focus is less on dealing with that issue. We feel like that is an area where many advocates have a focus already. We can provide that guidance, but I think the focus of our work is much less about people being removed from the roll and more around the deeper phenomenon behind that sort of summary assessment of other people's capacity.

The CHAIR: That is great to flag. Given we can see how much time and effort you have all put into this presentation – and we thank you very, very much for that – I think we will have a discussion offline to sort of pick up on Mr Ettershank's questions and his thoughts around getting more information from you, and then we will get Chris Gribbin from our team to reach back out to you with any of those questions or stats or facts or figures that we need. Thanks, Nathan.

Helen, I am mindful you had your hand up as well. Did you want to add something just before we close up?

Helen WILLIAMS: Thank you; I appreciate that. From a parent's perspective, not a CEO's perspective, one of the most powerful things for my son to be able to have the ability to understand and actually have the ability to vote was the fact that he was given the opportunity at school to have the education and the resources to learn about the process, but then also being able to have access to the easy-language resources to understand and then also to have a supportive network that could provide that information for him to make his own informed decisions, which were most of the time completely different from ours and our family's – there was

no influence there. If anything, my younger son, who does not have a cognitive disability, was the one that wanted to know who we were voting for so he could copy, not the other way around. So it is really important personally for me to see that many more people with a cognitive disability have access to equal opportunity, have access to that education and the training and the resources, even from a younger age, but right through, including when we do have the elections, so that they can make those informed decisions.

The CHAIR: Yes. That is a really good point, and it is a great place to finish, but it makes me think how during the presentation you said that one of the barriers is – and I am quoting this off the slide – too many people think that people with an intellectual disability cannot learn about politics or voting. Clearly, you have seen yourself that that is completely incorrect. I know; my uncle has a disability as well, and he absolutely loves learning, so I could not agree more with your points.

We will conclude there. I am mindful of time, but we have been pretty good at keeping it to where it is. Thank you all so much for taking the time to speak with us today. As mentioned at the beginning, you will be sent a proof copy of the transcript to check over as soon as it is available. Again, I thank each and every one of you for all of your time and dedication to this. The session is now concluded.

Committee adjourned.