



5<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
Spring St  
East Melbourne  
VIC 3002

### **Submission regarding the 2014 Victorian State election**

Dear Members of the Electoral Matters Committee,

I am a registered voter in the State of Victoria and a person with a mobility disability. I am a wheelchair user and because of that, I was presented with a much narrower choice of voting centres than my neighbours.

I live in the Electoral District of Preston. The EasyVote Guide that I received in the mail listed 20 voting centres in the Electoral District. Only two of them were rated as FWA (Full Wheelchair Access). Although this compares favourably to the 2010 state election, where zero out of 17 were rated as FWA, it shows that little progress has been made in the last four years.

With regard to voting centres rated AWA (Assisted Wheelchair Access), there were 11 out of 20. At the 2010 state election, the number was 2 out of 17. Again this compares favourably with 2010, but combining FWA and AWA voting centres, only 65% of voting centres are available to people who use wheelchairs.

However, the preceding figures are only for on-the-day voting. The early voting centre for the Preston district was rated NWA (No Wheelchair Access).

The closest voting place to my home was rated NWA. But I decided to go there anyway to investigate for myself. It turned out that there was a wheelchair ramp into the building and I waited in line with everyone else. Once inside, I had no trouble in casting my vote. The only inconvenience was not for me, but for other voters when I exited the building. Because the ramp entrance was being used as the main entry, people were queueing on the ramp. The ramp was not very wide and so all the people queueing on the ramp had to get off so that I could exit.

Later, I visited another local voting centre just to have a look. This venue was rated AWA. The wheelchair accessibility looked a little easier than at the first venue, but I did not go inside to investigate further. It left me wondering about the criteria being used to determine the wheelchair accessibility rating of each voting centre.

The method of accessibility assessment ultimately determines the rating provided in public information. It is apparent that for the 2014 state election, and maybe earlier

elections, some of the NWA, AWA and FWA ratings have been somewhat misleading.

All of that said however, 65% wheelchair accessibility to voting centres, the place where we go, along with our neighbours, to exercise our democratic right, is insufficient.

People with disabilities generally want to participate in community life the same as anyone else. To ask a person with mobility restrictions to travel further than others, or suffer more inconvenience than others, is discriminatory and state government and its agencies should be doing more to remove that discrimination.

People who have a disability have a right to expect equal and dignified access to the electoral process. The Victorian Electoral Commission should be congratulated on making positive progress in its obligation to provide it. State government, who are responsible for most of the buildings used as voting centres, also have a responsibility.

Of the 20 voting centres in the Preston District, 10 were state primary schools. Two of those were listed as FWA, 6 were AWA and 2 were listed as NWA (including the one closest to my home). Further, there were 5 church owned schools or halls – 3 were AWA and 2 were NWA.

Overall, I am happy to see an improvement of wheelchair accessibility to voting centres in 2014, but I suspect that a change in assessment criteria may have had some effect on the outcome. But there is still much to be done to eliminate discrimination from the electoral process.

In closing, all voting centres should be available for use by all people. This is the principle of Universal Access and the people of Victoria should expect nothing less.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Ray Jordan