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Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill 2009

In principle, Newcomers Network agrees with the comments made in the Second Reading Speech made on 25 June 2009 by Senator Penny Wong in relation to the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill 2009.

As the Citizenship Test Review Committee has suggested, the proposed amendments will allow 'a small group of people who have suffered torture or trauma to be eligible for citizenship without having to first sit a citizenship test' and this is to be commended.

It also mentions that 'by focusing on the pledge the Government has placed democratic beliefs, responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship, and the requirement to uphold and obey the laws of Australia at the heart of the citizenship test.'

It is pleasing to hear that the Australian Citizenship Test Resource Book will be revised with simpler English.

However, it is our belief that it is very difficult to comprehend democratic beliefs, responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship without basic English skills (unless someone has a permanent incapacity and needs Australian Citizenship as a type of 'residency' category).

If it is not possible for these marginalised applicants to sit an Australian Citizenship test either at the time of their application or shortly thereafter, can they be granted 'Temporary Australian Citizenship' until they are can secure Full Australian Citizenship (and can fully understand the pledge)?

It could be a modified version to ensure that they meet migration requirements but they may be precluded from working for the Australian



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Government and only secure a three year passport.

This would also encourage some level of self determination where the applicant, within an agreed period of time (say three years), can secure:

- 1) any additional medical treatment for their recovery
- 2) English language training to Basic English level
- 3) a minimum of 70% participation in an Australian Citizenship Course

before sitting either the standard Australian Citizenship Test or a revised Australian Citizenship Test (possibly an oral examination). Their attendance in the above programs can be used as part of the overall assessment for them securing full Australian Citizenship (not just an online test).

If necessary, the cost of this could be subsidised by the government as it seems that these applicants have already completed several tests in the past that have not been successful. This treatment and training will also enable these applicants to become much more effective citizens and give them a better chance of finding work and a good quality of productive life in Australia.

As to the proposed amendments allowing most clients to make an appointment to lodge an application and, on the same day, sit the test and have their application approved if all the legal requirements are met, this is also a step in the right direction and a necessary administrative improvement.

Having permanent residency for applicants under 18 also appears to be a pragmatic and logical progression.

I welcome any further updates on the Bill and anything other information in relation to Australian Citizenship and English Language Training.

Yours sincerely,

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