



5 September 2022

## SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS

To the members of the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards,

We have recently conducted research into the challenges experienced by members of the Victorian parliament as they transition to life after parliament. The research was commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria in conjunction with the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association, and with support from the Commonwealth Parliaments Association (Victoria Branch). Our report *Transitioning to Life after Parliament* (2021) is included in this submission.

Our research finds that nearly all MPs experience serious challenges—in areas such as health and mental wellbeing, securing new employment and maintaining familial and social relationships—as they transition to post-parliamentary life. The experience of these challenges and their consequences are most acute for MPs who leave parliament involuntarily (e.g., through electoral defeat), and therefore unexpectedly, in part because they typically have not planned for life after parliament. We made 10 recommendations to the Parliament of Victoria to mitigate these challenges.

The basic observation that emerges from our research findings, and which informs the recommendations that we propose, is the notion that parliamentary careers are inherently transitory. Despite the fact that many MPs have worked their whole lives towards the goal of entering parliament, most parliamentary careers are short (in Victoria, two terms or eight years). It is important that MPs do not adopt a view that they have ‘arrived’ and are ‘here to stay’. Such attitudes can be counterproductive to the goal of establishing a healthy workplace culture, as well as making the inevitable transition to life after parliament more difficult. Rather, parliament must be a workplace that conforms to the highest professional standards in all aspects of the role, and MPs must appreciate that they hold the privilege of representation for a limited time.

One of the major problems in the transition to life after parliament is the difficulty many former MPs experience in establishing post-parliamentary careers. The popular notion that former MPs are parachuted into well-paid positions is not supported by the evidence from Australia or elsewhere. Indeed, most MPs have a contrary experience, in that potential employers are not willing to employ a former MP. One of the reasons for this relates to the workplace culture of parliament: potential employers associate poor parliamentary culture with the work ethic and character of former MPs. An improvement of workplace culture in parliament would improve parliamentarians’ career opportunities post-parliament.

Many of our recommendations are relevant to the work of the current committee in that they aim to address certain cultural aspects of parliament.



Our first recommendation is a three-stage Parliamentary Career Support Program.

Stage One (Transitioning into Parliament) should be mandatory for all incoming MPs. This stage includes induction training in parliamentary process *and the culture of the parliament*.

Stage Two (Career Development Tools) takes place mid-term, and offers MPs *leadership and ethical training*, career coaching, and financial counselling.

Stage Three (Post-Parliamentary Planning) is offered to all MPs on leaving parliament.

We also recommend that all MPs should be able to receive lifelong psychological counselling on the recommendation of a general practitioner or registered psychologist.

The role of modern parliaments is expanding well beyond their traditional purview. As a workplace that sits at the heart of our democracy, it is vital that the workplace culture of parliaments comply with the highest professional standards. This will ensure that our democracy is held in the esteem it deserves.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission to your inquiry. We are available to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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