

Committee Secretary,
Legal and Constitutional Affairs.
24th June 2017

Inquiry: The Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I would like to bring to your attention the concerns that I have regarding the proposed changes to the Citizenship process.

I am a teacher who has lived here for nearly 8.5 years and who has been an Australian citizen for 2.5 years. My brother received his citizenship in May this year and my father who also works in Australia has had his application for citizenship approved and now awaiting his citizenship ceremony invitation. He was lucky enough to apply for citizenship before the 20th of April. However, my mother who has supported the family throughout all this applied on the 24th of April and her application is not being processed due to the government's proposed changes. Please bear in mind that although the bill has not been approved by parliament yet, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection has been given strict instructions not to process any applications received after the 19th of April. This has caused a lot of uncertainty for my family as we are now concerned about my mother not being able to meet the new requirements as these proposed changes were implemented overnight. Hence, my submission to the Senate Committee.

I agree with strengthening the Australian Values Statement, the test and introducing the requirement for applicants to demonstrate integration within the community. However, my concerns are regarding the reasons for increasing the general residency requirement and introduction of an English test.

General residency requirement

To become an Australian citizen applicants currently have to have resided in Australia for 4yrs. Increasing the permanent residency requirement from 1 to 4yrs does not mean that applicants become more committed to Australian values and lifestyle as many of them would have spent a long period of time already in Australia on various visas before applying for permanent residency.

English test

Another English test being made a requirement appears to be unnecessary as permanent residents' language skills will no doubt have improved over time since they would have resided in Australia for 4yrs prior to making the application for citizenship. In addition, this would be the third English test for the majority of applicants to undertake if this proposed change comes into effect. Accredited English language tests costs a lot of money and most applicants might not be able to afford to pay for this extra requirement. It does not seem fair that applicants have to demonstrate their language skills time and time again to prove their ability when they have lived in Australia for a number of years. It should be assumed that an applicant's English ability would have increased, never decreased, if they have resided in this country for a long time period.

Recommendation – not applying the proposed changes retrospectively

If these proposed changes regarding the residency requirement and English language test are absolutely necessary, it should be applied for new permanent residency applicants and not new citizenship applicants. It makes more sense to strengthen the permanent residency process as opposed to the citizenship process. This is mainly due to the fact that there are a lot of advantages of being a permanent resident than a regular Australian visa holder. In contrast, the advantages of being citizens rather than permanent residents are not as prominent.

Furthermore, these proposed changes will have a drastic effect on many current permanent residents' lives and families as the government does not appear to provide a transition period to those who are eligible to apply for citizenship. It is unethical to introduce new rules without providing adequate time for applicants to prepare, and also not fair to those who have lived here for a very long time. Applicants who committed to undertaking the financial strain of getting the permanent residency up until this date had presumed the requirements for citizenship would remain in place. It is fairer and makes more sense to apply the proposed changes to new permanent residency applicants after 20th April 2017. In essence, these new changes should not be applied retrospectively.

I implore you to please consider my views and others in this matter, and I hope the Australian government makes an educated and reasonable decision regarding these proposed changes.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,