



Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

**RE: Submission to Inquiry into the 2022 federal election**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the 2022 federal election.

The matter I wish to bring to the committee's attention is in relation to section 'f' of the Committee's Terms of Reference; *'encouraging increased electoral participation and supporting enfranchisement generally'*. I believe stricter rules relating to campaigning at polling booths (as outlined further below) would significantly assist the public to feel safe and empowered to participate in elections.

My position is based on my experience at the federal election on 21 May 2022. I was very excited to take up the privilege of voting and brought my 18 month old child to experience it for the first time.

I went to my local primary school around 9.30am and had to stand in line. Due to Covid social distancing and the popularity of the booth I found myself outside of the 6 metre no advertising barrier where I was forced to wait surrounded by campaign volunteers. There was no clear space to wait and I was in the middle of at least a dozen campaigners who were all jostling for attention with their how to vote cards. It already felt uncomfortable as these people were encroaching well within 1.5 meters of social distancing suggestions but their heckling was also intimidating. I was talking to my husband and child when a number of campaigners stated trying to persuade me to vote for their candidates-I didn't strike up the engagement and was trying to ignore them. I finally said they could all 'stand down' as I knew who I was voting for and one campaign volunteer told me that I didn't love my child or care for their future because I wasn't voting for their candidate. Firstly, I would make pains to be clear, no one but I knew who I was voting for as it is a secret ballot; as far as they could have known I was voting for their candidate. Secondly, and more importantly, this is unacceptable to say to someone at all. I have suffered severe postnatal depression and anxiety and had a very difficult time being a mother. These words, telling me I am a bad mother and didn't love my child, really rocked my mental health recovery. I was inconsolably upset by this unwarranted and unprovoked attack on me and yet I was expected to remain in line amongst the campaigners and proceed to place my vote.

The safety of electors while approaching and waiting to place their votes at polling booths should be better protected. I believe that stricter and larger non-advertising perimeters around booths (particularly in light of increased social distancing) would improve voter safety. Furthermore, limiting the number of campaign volunteers allowed to provide how to vote cards would decrease the mob mentality and competition between campaigners to get their voice heard and protect those on their way, or in line, to vote from heckling and intimidation. These simple measures will encourage increased electoral participation and voter empowerment as voters will feel safe and respected as they approach the polling booths.

I respect the desire of candidates to provide how to vote cards and have campaigners volunteers or candidates available to answer voter questions, but following my experience I wish to ensure no one is every harassed or spoken to as I was again.

Regards,

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