

Dear Secretary

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Commitments for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018

My name is _____, a Jordanian citizen and a New Zealand permanent resident living in Australia for the past 11 years. I currently work as a Program Management Office (PMO) Manager within the _____ in Sydney. I came to Australia in 2007 pursuing higher education in Engineering and Information Technology. I received two master degrees in 2008 and 2009 as top of the class and started my career straight after. Ever since, I have filled several managerial positions within the project management and IT industries in private and public sectors including state and federal government departments. Unfortunately and despite several attempts, I was unable to obtain the Australian permanent residency previously for various reasons. However, I will be eligible to be granted the Australian residency early 2020 through the family (partner) stream.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Commitments for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018 based on the following concerns:

Extension of residence requirements:

The proposed amendments require an applicant to demonstrate four years of continuous permanent residence in Australia for the purposes of “greater examination” of their “integration with Australia”.

I believe this requirement has no other effect other than to delay the application. It also discounts time already spent in Australia by residents who have lived in Australia for extended periods and have become active and contributing members of the community. My situation is a prime example, I have lived in Australia for over a decade, acquired two master degrees, worked for private and government institutions, got married to an Australian citizen and starting a family here in Sydney, yet I am seen (through this bill) as not “integrated” enough in the Australian society and need to wait an extra 4 years to do so.

As the main purpose of the period extension is to ensure any citizen is well integrated, it should take into consideration the previous residency period in Australia and any elements that contribute to this integration (i.e. education, work, experience, family etc.). This however is not considered in the bill, and therefore it risks creating an injustice to those like myself who are already contributing highly to the Australian society. As a public sector employee for the past 7 years I managed and supported a number of key state and federal government programs and projects that offer ease and convenience to the Australian citizens and communities, these include:

It is highly unjust to overlook such contribution and still be perceived as “unintegrated member” in a country I always call home.

Under item 53, the Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill indicates that a residence requirement:

“Is an objective measure of an aspiring citizen’s association with Australia. This period allows a person the opportunity to gain an understanding of shared Australian values, and the commitment they must make to become an Australian citizen. It also allows them time to integrate into the Australian community and acquire English language skills required for life in Australia as a successful citizen. Extending the general residency period strengthens the integrity of the citizenship programme by providing more time to examine a person’s character as a permanent resident in Australia”.

I personally agree that living in Australia for this period will help in gaining insight into Australian values, acquire English language skills, and commence integration into the Australian community, this however is also can be achieved wether I am living for the same amount of years as a permanent resident, on temporary visa, as a New Zealand resident, or even as a refugee. The period ensures integration in the Australian society because of the specified amount of years (4 years) required not for the type of residency or visa being held.

If the proposed legislation amendment passes, it will take me another 6 years from now before I become eligible to apply for the Australian citizenship despite already spending the previous 11 years living, studying, establishing a family and positively contributing to the societies, communities and citizens of this country which seems significantly harsh, unfair and injustice.

The new English language requirement

The Citizenship Amendment Bill indicates that applicants for citizenship will need to demonstrate competent English. The Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill explains:

“This amendment reflects the fact that English language proficiency is essential for economic participation and promotes integration into the Australian community. It is an important creator of social cohesion and is essential to experiencing economic and social success in Australia”.

Although the bill provides exemption to certain English speaking country’ citizens such as Canada the UK, and New Zealand it neglects to mention permanent residents of these countries. An exemption for certain education degrees from certain institutions is also introduced in the bill, but neglects to take in account the working years spent in Australia and the gained experience which increases both language skills and social cohesion.

I believe being a resident in Australia for over a decade, studying, working, and positively contributing to the growth of the nation should be an indication to my English proficiency without the need to sit for an English examination to determine so.

In light of the above, I ask that my personal situation be taken as an evidence of the invalidity of this bill and provide a strong reason of why this bill should not be passed.

Sincerely,