

**Association
for the Blind of WA**
Guide Dogs WA

Mr Daryl Melham MP: Chairperson
c/o Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
CANBERRA ACT 2600

26 August 2008

Dear Mr Melham MP

Re: Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into and report on all aspects of the 2007 Federal election and matters related thereto.

Thank you for providing the Association for the Blind of WA with opportunity to send a representative to the inquiry's recent public hearing in Perth.

At the conclusion of Carol Solosy's appearance, you invited the Association to lodge an additional submission should it so wish. In response to the discussion during her appearance, the nature of questions asked has prompted our organisation to make the following supplementary comments.

1. It is the case that the majority of people who are blind or vision impaired are clustered in the upper age group and that currently many have no experience in the use of computers.
2. However, it is expected that –
 - 2.1 due to the forthcoming significant increase in the aged population, the number of people who are blind or vision impaired will also grow significantly; and
 - 2.2 more people moving into this cohort will be familiar with, and competent in the use of computer technology.
3. Providing a facility to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to cast a confidential vote is a very important initiative. However, the benefits of such provision can only be realised if available within premises that are accessible.
4. Given that providing such facilities at every polling place is not feasible, the provision of additional facilities in strategic locations is the next best option.

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5. The success of such venues will strongly depend upon:
- 5.1 selecting premises –
 - a. in areas where there is a higher concentration of residents who are blind or vision impaired; and
 - b. that are close to suitable public transport; and
 - c. have accessible means of entry and egress; and
 - d. have accessible interior design features to aid orientation and mobility.
 - 5.2 determining accessible polling places with sufficient lead time to allow for –
 - e. their adequate promotion; and
 - f. the Association's provision of any orientation and mobility training to its clients.
 - 5.3 working with the Association to offer its clients equipment demonstrations in the lead-up to polling day.

With respect to point 5.1 a, the Association has previously liaised with the Western Australian Electoral Commission about its placement of Video Magnifier equipment in polling places. Based on its database, the Association has identified postcodes in which the highest concentration of its clients reside – resulting in 3 regional and 9 metropolitan locations. This is a service that we would be pleased to provide to the Australian Electoral Commission when it next considers the appropriate placement of accessible voting facilities.

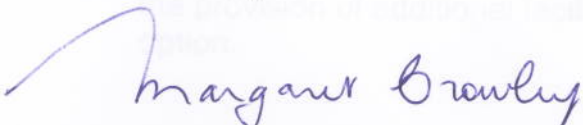
Lastly, with reference to questions about the user-friendliness of the equipment provided, testimonials from two of our vision impaired staff who used it to cast their votes confirm that:

- it was uncomplicated and therefore very quick and easy to use;
- the instructions were effective; and
- the keyboard layout was similarly simple to use; and
- all of the system voices were clear; and
- printing the vote in the form of a barcode was a good idea; and
- it promoted a feeling of safety and security in contrast to previous, more intimidating experiences of patronising a "normal" polling place and having to whisper to someone providing personal, vote casting assistance.

A final comment expressed strong desire for these facilities to be more readily available. To get from home to the nearest trial site would require 3 hours travelling on public transport in order to spend 5 minutes casting a vote.

In closing, I re-iterate our organisation's strong support for this initiative and urge that future provision of such facilities is continued and extended.

Yours sincerely



Dr Margaret Crowley
Chief Executive Officer