



**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
NATIONAL COUNCIL  
*good works*

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

## **INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT (CITIZENSHIP TESTING) BILL 2007**

### **Introduction**

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs regarding the Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007.

### **Citizenship Test**

The St Vincent de Paul Society assists migrants and refugees around Australia. We support the notion of measures to encourage and assist migrants and refugees to learn English and to gain a helpful understanding of our Australian culture. We also support the government encouraging inclusion of permanent residents as part of Australia through citizenship. However, we consider that the present interview method for citizenship has worked well and is to be preferred to testing. We do not accept the citizenship test will improve the quality of persons applying for citizenship and instead expect it will act as a barrier against worthy candidates, potentially damaging the concept of belonging as part of citizenship.

We are concerned that very little is known about the content of the citizenship test. This important part of the Bill, can not be fully assessed.

We do not accept that the ability to complete the citizenship test gives a proper measure of the qualities desirable in an Australian citizen. We do not believe that it will be possible to establish a test using a clearly defined set of 'Australian values'. It promotes a monoculture that destroys our multicultural heritage and ignores indigenous Australia. A

test can not establish qualities of integrity, readiness to live in harmony and ability to contribute socially and economically to Australia. An educated criminal is more likely to pass such test than an honest but uneducated immigrant seeking to become an Australian citizen. Passing the citizenship test require no personal commitment to Australian values, but rather a good memory. We expect Australia has many fine citizens who would have failed the proposed test. We support a personal commitment to upholding universal or core values shared by Australians.

Our volunteers know that many migrants and refugees are highly desirous of becoming Australian citizens. The same migrants and refugees often have not had the advantage of a full education. We fear that vulnerable migrants and refugees seeking citizenship will be exploited by those providing 'training' on the test at considerable cost.

The funding for implementation of the citizenship test would be better used encouraging permanent residents to obtain citizenship and assisting initiatives to respond to the needs of humanitarian migrants and refugees.

## **Conclusion**

The St Vincent de Paul Society supports strengthening universal values held by Australians and knowledge of Australia, but promotes same as part of ongoing support to new citizens not as a test. Accordingly the St Vincent de Paul Society is unable to support the Bill.

**John Meahan AM**  
**President**  
**National Council of Australia**