

**TEU****TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION**
TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI

Submission of

**Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education
Union**

to the

Justice Committee

on the

Electoral Amendment Bill

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1. Te Tīmatanga | Introduction

- 1.1. Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the *Electoral Amendment Bill*.
- 1.2. The TEU is the largest union and professional association representing 12,000 academic and general/allied staff in the tertiary education sector (in universities, institutes of technology/polytechnics, wānanga, private training establishments, and rural education activities programmes).
- 1.3. The TEU actively acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation for the relationship between Māori and the Crown. We recognise the significance of specific reference to Te Tiriti in the Education Act and the emergent discourse resulting from this. We also accept the responsibilities and actions that result from our nation's signing of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 1.4. The TEU expresses its commitment to Te Tiriti by working to apply the four whāinga (values) from our *Te Koeke Tiriti* framework as a means to advance our TEU Te Tiriti relationship in all our work and decision-making – with members and when engaging on broader issues within the tertiary sector and beyond – such as our response to the *Electoral Amendment Bill*.

Tū kotahi, tū kaha – We are strong and unified; we are committed to actions which will leave no-one behind; we create spaces where all people can fully participate, are fairly represented, and that foster good relationships between people.

Ngā piki, ngā heke – We endure through good times and bad; we work to minimise our impact on the environment; we foster ahikā – the interrelationship of people and the land, including supporting tūrangawaewae – a place where each has the right to stand and belong.

Awhi atu, awhi mai – We take actions that seek to improve the lives of the most vulnerable; we give and receive, acknowledging that reciprocity is fundamental to strong and equitable relationships; and we work to advance approaches that ensure quality public tertiary education for all.

Tātou, tātou e – We reach our goals through our collective strength and shared sense of purpose, which are supported through participatory democratic decision-making processes and structures.

- 1.5. Our response to the *Electoral Amendment Bill* stems from our commitment to the whāinga expressed above and our wish to see these enacted in the tertiary education sector and in our society and communities.

2. TEU POSITION

- 2.1. TEU strongly opposes the Electoral Amendment Bill (the Bill).
- 2.2. TEU supports the submission put forward by Te Kauae Kaimahi New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU).

3. RATIONALE

- 3.1. TEU opposes the Bill in its current form. We are deeply concerned that the Bill represents a direct assault on New Zealand's democratic traditions and is inconsistent with the values of an open, inclusive, and participatory society. Elements of the Bill are reminiscent of voter suppression tactics associated with anti-liberal governments internationally, and we firmly believe that such approaches have no place in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 3.2. If enacted, the Bill would disenfranchise a significant proportion of the voting public and risk doing long-lasting damage to New Zealanders' trust in both this government and the integrity of our electoral system. For more than three decades, successive governments have pursued reforms designed to expand accessibility, improve enrolment flexibility, and encourage voter participation. This Bill takes us backwards by reversing those gains and restricting the ability of citizens to exercise their fundamental democratic rights.
- 3.3. These changes will have a particular impact on tertiary students. Students are often highly transient, moving between family homes, flats, residence halls, and even moving to different towns and regions during their study period. They rely heavily on same-day enrolment to ensure their participation. Removing this flexibility will disproportionately disenfranchise younger voters, many of whom are already under-represented in democratic processes. This will have a long-term effect on voter turnout – ensuring citizens vote as soon as they turn 18 increases the probability of a life-time of engagement with our political system.
- 3.4. Another group that will be disproportionately affected are staff employed on short-term or casual contracts, including the thousands in the tertiary sector. Citizens in insecure work are more likely to face barriers to enrolment under the proposed regime. Restricting access in this way undermines the democratic voice of those groups central to Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary education system.
- 3.5. The government has not sought or secured a mandate for these reforms. There has been no meaningful consultation, nor was such change signalled in election

campaigns. Furthermore, the Bill is being advanced despite clear advice from officials warning against key provisions.

3.6. Taken together, these circumstances create the perception that the Bill is a partisan attempt to suppress participation, particularly through curtailing the use of special votes, which have historically favoured opposition parties.

4. KEY AREAS OF CONCERN

4.1. In line with NZCTU's submission, we are particularly concerned with the following aspects of the Bill:

- 4.1.1. **Registration deadline:** The removal of the ability to enroll up to and including polling day is an undue restriction on the right to vote. It disproportionately impacts young people, and others already under-represented in electoral participation.
- 4.1.2. **Bribery and treating provisions:** The proposed reforms risk criminalising legitimate civic activity, including community initiatives that encourage voter turnout. This could deter engagement and suppress participation in ways that are counter to democratic health.
- 4.1.3. **Political finance transparency:** The Bill loosens reporting requirements in ways that reduce transparency around donations. This undermines public confidence and increases the risk that wealthy donors can exercise disproportionate influence over political outcomes.
- 4.1.4. **Prisoner disenfranchisement:** The reinstatement of a blanket ban on prisoner voting removes an important democratic right, contravenes international best practice, and further marginalises already vulnerable groups.

5. TEU RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. For these reasons – and following the NZCTU's submission – we strongly recommend that the following elements be removed from the Bill:

- 5.1.1. Clauses 4-8, which remove the ability to enrol up to and including polling day.
- 5.1.2. Clause 10 and related provisions, which institute a blanket ban on prisoners' right to vote.
- 5.1.3. Clauses 43 and 46, which unduly restrict legitimate civic activities that support voter engagement.

5.1.4. Clauses 119 and 120, which entrench opacity in political donations and reduce protections against undue influence.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. The right to vote is a cornerstone of Aotearoa New Zealand's democracy and must not be eroded. This Bill undermines public trust, restricts participation, and introduces unjustified limits on fundamental rights.

6.2. TEU therefore urges the Justice Committee to reject the Bill in its current form and to uphold the principles of inclusion, fairness, and transparency that underpin our democratic system.