



## **Submission of Taituarā – Local Government Professionals Aotearoa regarding the Local Electoral (Advertising) Amendment Bill**

### ***What is Taituarā?***

Taituarā — Local Government Professionals Aotearoa thanks the Justice Committee for the opportunity to respond to the Local Electoral (Advertising) Amendment Bill.

Taituarā — Local Government Professionals Aotearoa (formerly the NZ Society of Local Government Managers) is an incorporated society of almost 1000 members drawn from local government Chief Executives, senior managers, and council staff with significant policy or operational responsibilities. We are an apolitical organisation. Our contribution lies in our wealth of knowledge of the local government sector and of the technical, practical, and managerial implications of legislation.

Our vision is:

*Professional local government management, leading staff and enabling communities to shape their future.*

Our primary role is to help local authorities perform their roles and responsibilities as effectively and efficiently as possible. We have an interest in all aspects of the management of local authorities from the provision of advice to elected members, to the planning and delivery of services, to the less glamorous but equally important supporting activities such as election management and the collection of rates.

We make this submission on behalf of those who are charged with the administration of local elections, and with supporting all candidates be they sitting members or challengers during the election period.

### ***The Bill addresses a very real risk***

The policy rationale underpinning this Bill is clear and simple. Removing requirements to disclose a residential address from the authorisation for electoral advertising reduces the risk of opportunistic abuse or harassment of candidates standing for election. We should be encouraging candidates to offer themselves for election.

We have no additional improvements to the Bill and commend it to the Select Committee, and the House.

### ***Transparency is maintained though that does come with some risk***

The Bill will not totally reduce the risk of candidates arising from a need to disclose their residential address. Candidates must supply a residential address as part of the nomination requirements, and nomination forms must be available for public inspection at council premises. Most candidates are listed on the electoral roll. The difference is that both require an elector to take action other than just seeing something in a pamphlet or newspaper, or accessing something on social media.

### ***The behaviours that this Bill addresses are a symptom of a declining level of civic discourse***

Of course, it is a commentary on the state of civic discourse that there is a need for this Bill at all. New Zealand has a proud history of a relatively high level of freedom of expression, freedom of thought and freedom of association. But like many other nations, while it is easy to lay responsibility at the door of a few groups or individuals, the truth is these people, their views and their choice of means to express them and to seek to bend others to their will is a symptom of far wider concerns.

### ***Longer-term, New Zealand needs to rethink its approach to civic education***

We submit that the long-term counter to the types of behaviours this Bill seeks to address is to address the culture that spawned them. As a nation we need to enhance the level of civic discourse as a precursor to rebuilding tolerance. When we say 'civics' we speak to the need to inculcate an interest in being actively involved in communities and an understanding the value of community and participation for the common good.

We have previously submitted to the equivalent of this Committee in previous Parliaments regarding the importance of civics education.<sup>1</sup> In this, we are far from alone.

Advice a predecessor to this Committee received in 2014, noted that the more common approach for teaching civics is as a separate stand-alone subject rather than “embedded in the principles, values and key competencies of the New Zealand curriculum<sup>2</sup> and taught in social studies, health, languages and arts curricula.

The last international comparative study of civic awareness and knowledge that this country participated in actually ranked New Zealand students above average with their peers. This comes despite that same study citing New Zealand as one of two nations where the authors found civic education has a low priority (their words)<sup>3</sup> Sadly that study was in 2009. New Zealand did not participate in the 2016 edition of that study – in fairness it appears none of the English-speaking countries did.

The Electoral Commission do undertake the so-called Kids Voting programme in advance of general elections. We understand that this has a relatively good take-up. This is also run by some local authorities. But of course civics is much more than ‘just’ voting.

We are aware that the Scandinavian countries make experiential learning a key component of their programmes e.g. site visits, mock debates and the like. The American Centre for Civic Education runs a programme called ‘We, The People’ where high-school age children debate issues of relevance and discuss constitution related issues.

We’ve become aware that the Ministry of Education has produced a recent (2020) and very useful teaching and learning guide.<sup>4</sup> The guide restates the core values and objectives of civics education (though it appears with more of a social studies lens). The guide then provides a series of exemplars of resources or programmes deemed effective at different levels of the curriculum. This includes at least one example of a mock debate on a local issue with/through a local authority.

---

<sup>1</sup> Civics education is much more than education about the act of voting. A good civics curriculum would include what a democracy is, how government operates, the individual’s rights to participate in a democratic society and their means of doing so.

<sup>2</sup> Lang, What do New Zealand students understand about civic knowledge and citizenship: Results from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Schulze et al, ICCS 2009 International Report, Civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement among lower secondary school students in 38 countries, pp 44- 45

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://sltk-resources.tki.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Teaching-and-Learning-Guide.pdf>

Predecessors to this Committee have regularly called for enhancements to civics education. We call on the Committee to not only renew that recommendation, but perhaps consider something more, for example an inquiry into civics education and awareness in general.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. That the Committee recommend that the Bill be enacted in its present form.**
- 2. That the Committee renew its recommendations that central government look to enhance the civics curriculum.**