

RUN FOR IT

31 July 2023

Mr Josh Burns MP
Chair
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
Parliament House
Canberra ACT2600

Via email: human.rights@aph.gov.au

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework

Dear Chair,

I am writing on behalf of Run For It. We are a powerful movement of young people working to rebuild our democracy and create a better kind of politics for future generations. Run For It supports young people who are leaders in their communities to run strategic and strong campaigns to get elected to local councils across Australia.

The Australian Parliament should enact a federal Human Rights Act

Human rights are the tools we use to fight for the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. A federal Human Rights Act would provide all of us – the tools to demand we are treated as equals in our society.

This is particularly important for young people who are currently excluded from fully participating in their democracy. From 16 years of age, young people can drive, work, pay taxes and enlist in the army - but they can't vote until they turn 18. As the generation that will inherit the consequences of decisions made today, young people have a lot at stake in the political process.

The right to vote

The right to vote is a fundamental component of our democracy. The obligation to protect and promote the right of every citizen to universal and equal suffrage is recognised in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Noting that the right to vote may be subject to reasonable restrictions, which may include setting a minimum age.

New Zealand has had a Human Rights Act (the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990*) for over thirty years. Recently the New Zealand Supreme Court has found that laws setting the voting age for New Zealanders at 18 are inconsistent with the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of age enshrined in the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990*.

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The Supreme Court of New Zealand in *Make It 16 Incorporated v Attorney-General [2022] NZSC 134* found that lowering the voting age to 16 years would protect the fundamental rights of young people in circumstances where Parliamentary and electoral processes alone may not be effective in protecting their rights to political participation.

Further, the Court referred to New Zealand's obligations to "assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in matters affecting the child" as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Lowering the voting age is not a revolutionary idea

Lowering the voting age is not a new idea - and is already a reality in many countries across the globe. Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador, who like Australia have compulsory voting, have all lowered their voting age. So have Cuba, Nicaragua, Austria, Ecuador, Argentina, Malta, Scotland and Wales.

Each of these countries has seen clear benefits from changing their voting age, including higher rates of political engagement, with young people learning more about their political systems earlier and in some instances participating in elections at higher rates than older age groups.

Conclusion

We require guidelines to make ours a fairer, more prosperous and more livable world. A Human Rights Act for Australia would provide those guidelines. A Human Rights Act for Australia would mean that no one is left behind, particularly young people who despite being part of the social, economic and political fabric of our communities - can't have a say on what they want their country and community to look like.

Sincerely,



Edward Krutsch
National Director
Run For It