

15 March 2023  
Our ref: 5927782



Hon Kyam Maher MLC  
Attorney-General  
[AttorneyGeneral@sa.gov.au](mailto:AttorneyGeneral@sa.gov.au)

Dear Attorney-General

We write to request your support for State Government action to strengthen the policy and legislative frameworks that underpin our democratic processes. We have also written to Premier Malinauskas and the Minister for Local Government, the Hon Geoff Brock MP, on this matter.

You would be aware of the disruption to a council meeting at the City of Onkaparinga on 17 January 2023 by an organised group of protesters espousing conspiracy theorist ideologies.

Unfortunately, it has become apparent that the disruptive and aggressive behaviour of this group of protesters was not an isolated incident. This is the same group that obstructed the City of Onkaparinga's election count in November 2022. A disruption to a City of Salisbury council meeting also involved persons aligned with this group and commentary reflecting the group's ethos has been made by a City of Playford elected member.

We believe this will be an ongoing issue for our sector, one which will require a consolidated and consistent response. Our primary concern is the safety of elected members, staff and the community who attend these meetings. We also seek to protect our society's democratic freedoms.

As such, we have engaged with other metropolitan councils, the Local Government Association, Electoral Commissioner, Minister for Local Government and the Premier, seeking proactive changes to state legislation to safeguard our democracy and democratic processes. Key priorities include:

- **Timing of elections**

Having state and local elections conducted in the same calendar year contributes to voter fatigue and poor 'turn out', clearing the path for fringe groups to organise effectively.

- **Compulsory voting**

Significantly, we are requesting consideration of compulsory voting for local government in South Australia. This would ensure that the majority of community voices would be represented through a democratically elected local government. While this is a significant change from current practice, we believe that a well-functioning local government sector may depend on it.

- **Public meeting procedures**

We are seeking further flexibility to balance the requirement for public meetings and to ensure a safe working environment. This could include the provision to conduct meetings online as occurred during COVID 19.

- **Timeliness of Code of Conduct investigations**

It is apparent that this group of protestors includes elected members of council or individuals who wish to become elected members. Our experience in dealing with breaches of code of conduct investigations is that they can be protracted and lack any real deterrent to poor behavior.

- **Candidate qualifications**

There are few checks and balances carried out on candidates before nominating as a candidate for local government elections. Criminal history checks should be implemented as a minimum standard. Other desirable attributes could include financial literacy and relevant experience or qualifications.

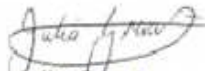
As the Minister responsible for administering the *Electoral Act 1985* we seek your support for these legislative changes, particularly those relating to the timing of elections, compulsory voting and candidate vetting.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to meet with you at your convenience to discuss this matter further. Please have your office contact Michelle Wilby, Mayor Liaison Officer on 8384 1118 or via email [michelle.wilby@onkaparinga.sa.gov.au](mailto:michelle.wilby@onkaparinga.sa.gov.au) to arrange a suitable time for us to meet.

Yours sincerely



Moira Were AM  
Mayor



Julia Grant  
Acting Chief Executive Officer