1 June 2007

Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Parliament House,
East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002

Inquiry into conduct of Victorian State Election 2006

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing about the growing demand for a more equitable, transparent and accountable electoral system that is deserving of consideration in your inquiry into the conduct of the state election in Victoria.

Political donations are widely regarded as undermining and damaging our democratic system, with many political representatives increasingly accepting donations from a broad range of interests - developers, tobacco, gambling and liquor industries - as well as wealthy individuals.

It's not surprising that large donations are used to gain access and influence with politicians - and this means wealthy donors can influence government decisions, which often benefit the donor at a cost to the wider community. The steady increase in political donations, now estimated at nearly $200m a year – is paying for costly, drawn-out election campaigns that add to the level of community concern and frustration.

To make matters worse, recent changes to national electoral laws have eroded electoral rights and made secret donations even easier - with no public disclosure required for up to eighteen months after they have been received.

Our electoral system, of which we should be proud, is necessarily compromised by this absence of transparency; and the broader community cannot make an informed voting decision when uncertainty exists about the real and potential influences on current or alternative governments.

While countries like New Zealand, Canada and the UK have acted to limit election funding, our governments are moving in the opposite direction - making electoral funding less, not more, transparent.

As legislative reform is long overdue, we are seeking your support for measures to improve our electoral system by commencing a reform process, including:

- a full parliamentary inquiry into the scope, effects and proposals for reform;
- an investigation into more ethical models, such as the Canadian legislative reforms at http://canadaonline.about.com/cs/govtethics/a/polfinancebill.htm; and
- a National Summit of experts, leaders and public interest groups to help identify the way forward.
We would be pleased to provide further information as our concerns and recommendations are supported by a coalition of health, medical, welfare and ethical leaders and organisations.

We can be contacted on tel. (02) 93341876.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Jones
Chief Executive Officer