



Submission from the Len Reynolds Trust on the Electoral Amendment Bill

Date: 14 August 2025

About Us

The Len Reynolds Trust is a philanthropic trust based in the Waikato. Our vision is a region where all children and young people are secure, resilient, and thriving. We work in close partnership with Māori and rural communities, focusing on equity, whānau and tamariki wellbeing, and creating long-term social impact. We support initiatives that reduce harm, build capability, and dismantle systemic barriers - particularly for those most affected by deprivation and exclusion.

Our strategy commits us to:

- Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi in all aspects of our work.
- Challenging inequities and systemic biases that disadvantage certain communities.
- Practising empathy, manaakitanga, and partnership in decision-making.
- Advocating for systems that are inclusive, accessible, and community-driven.

The Electoral Amendment Bill, as currently drafted, moves Aotearoa in the opposite direction. It creates more barriers to participation, disproportionately impacts those already marginalised, and risks further eroding trust in democratic processes.

Our Concerns and Why They Matter

1. Ending Same-Day and Election-Day Enrolment

Removing the ability to enrol and vote on the same day will disenfranchise those who are already least likely to be on the roll - including rangatahi, Māori, rural residents, transient workers, and people experiencing housing insecurity.



From our work, we know these communities often face logistical and systemic barriers to enrolling early:

- Rural voters may have limited access to postal services or physical enrolment points.
- People in precarious housing may move frequently and have unstable addresses.
- Māori and young people, who already have lower enrolment rates, are overrepresented in these groups.

Our strategy prioritises levelling the playing field. This change would tilt it further against those with fewer resources, undermining our vision of an equitable Waikato where all young people can thrive and participate fully.

2. Blanket Ban on Prisoner Voting

Reinstating a complete ban on prisoner voting – regardless of sentence length – strips away a fundamental civic right from Māori, a group already overrepresented in prison statistics, compounding existing inequities and systemic disadvantage.

This contradicts our commitment to:

- Equity: Addressing the structural over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system.
- Manaakitanga: Supporting rehabilitation and reintegration, which are undermined when civic rights are removed.
- Challenging Power Imbalances: Ensuring that the most marginalised still have a voice in shaping the systems that affect them.

Blanket disenfranchisement is not a neutral policy choice - it sends a message that some members of our community are not worthy of participation, further entrenching disconnection and mistrust.

3. Restricting Community Engagement at Polling Stations (“Treating”)

While preventing undue influence is important, extending restrictions to ban acts such as offering free food or drink near polling places risks erasing culturally grounded expressions of manaakitanga and hospitality, especially in rural and Māori contexts.

In some small communities, kai and hospitality are integral to civic life and community events. Criminalising these acts without nuance risks alienating voters and undermining the relational approach that encourages participation in remote or marginalised areas.



4. Raising the Anonymous Donation Threshold

Increasing the anonymous donation threshold reduces transparency in political funding. This is a step backwards for public trust, and contrary to our commitment to transparent, accountable systems that serve the public good.

Recommendations

We urge the Committee to:

1. Maintain Same-Day Enrolment

- Retain or significantly shorten any cut-off period for enrolment so no one is excluded from voting due to administrative deadlines.

2. Protect Prisoner Voting Rights

- At a minimum, allow voting for those serving short sentences, and develop a pathway for full restoration aligned with Te Tiriti principles and rehabilitation goals.

3. Review “Treating” Provisions

- Ensure restrictions do not criminalise culturally appropriate expressions of manaakitanga or activities that foster democratic participation, especially in rural and Māori settings.

4. Maintain or Lower the Anonymous Donation Threshold

- Strengthen transparency to ensure political influence is open to public scrutiny.

Conclusion

This Bill, as written, increases barriers to participation for the very communities we work alongside every day. It risks silencing Māori, rural, young, and marginalised voices in ways that will have long-term consequences for social cohesion and democratic legitimacy.

True electoral reform should strengthen both integrity and inclusion - not trade one off against the other. We urge the Committee to amend the Bill to ensure all New Zealanders, regardless of background or circumstance, have a fair and accessible pathway to participate in our democracy.

Ngā mihi nui,
Melissa Gibson
CEO, Len Reynolds Trust

