



## RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

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PETITION No.: **421-01852**

BY: **MR. DUSSEAULT (SHERBROOKE)**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 9, 2017**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **ANDY FILLMORE**

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Response by the Minister of Democratic Institutions

SIGNATURE

Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

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SUBJECT

**PARLIAMENT OF CANADA**

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**ORIGINAL TEXT**

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**REPLY**

The Government of Canada is pleased to respond to this petition.

Canadians expect that their elected officials will hold themselves to the highest standard. They deserve no less.

The Government of Canada will continue to work to strengthen and protect our democratic institutions and ensure they represent the values of Canadians. The Government looks forward to the important work ahead.

The Government has introduced Bill C-33, which proposes amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* to repeal elements of the previous government's *Fair Elections Act*, among other measures. The Bill contains seven measures which would make it easier for Canadians to vote and enhance public trust in the integrity of the electoral process. The seven measures are as follows:

- **Bill C-33 would repeal the *Fair Elections Act* provision excluding the Voter Information Card (VIC) from the list of acceptable identification.** The VIC is the most current and accurate form of government-issued proof of residence during an election. Of electors who have difficulty with identification requirements, the difficulty is typically with proof of residence. Of the few forms of official identification featuring residence information, the

most common is a driver's licence which is often not carried by youth, disabled Canadians, seniors, Indigenous peoples, urban dwellers in major city centres, and homeless electors. Elections Canada conducted pilot projects during by-elections in 2010 and in the 2011 general election that demonstrated the VIC could help many of these groups to vote. During the 2011 general election, approximately 900,000 Canadians at 5,608 polling stations were eligible to use the VIC as identification and a significant percentage of these did so. If passed, Bill C-33 would make it easier for people to vote by allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to authorize the VIC as an approved form of identification.

- **Bill C-33 would repeal the attestation mechanism introduced by the *Fair Elections Act* and restore the vouching system for electors voting without adequate identification.** Currently, only electors with two pieces of proof of identity may make use of the attestation mechanism to establish their residence. The vouching process would allow electors without proof of identity to vote. A February 2016 survey by Statistics Canada found that an estimated 172,000 non-voters stated that a lack of identification was a reason for not voting in the 2015 election. Indigenous people in particular were impacted by this. Restoring vouching will make it easier for people to vote.
- **Expanding the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate to undertake broad public education campaigns.** The *Fair Elections Act* restricted the kind of public education campaigns the Chief Electoral Officer could undertake. Currently, the Chief Electoral Officer may only conduct educational programs with primary and high school age children. The Chief Electoral Officer recommended his mandate be extended to allow Elections Canada to deliver non-partisan public education and information programs to all Canadians. Lack of information about voting can be a barrier to voting. If Bill C-33 is passed, this measure would lift existing limits and allow the Chief Electoral Officer to communicate with Canadians without restrictions.
- **Creating a National Register of Future Electors, so Elections Canada can pre-register Canadian youth aged 14-17.** The Chief Electoral Officer recommended that one way of preparing young people to vote would be by introducing youth pre-registration. If passed, the bill would allow Elections Canada to work with young people in schools and other settings. Pre-registration of youth with Elections Canada would allow Elections Canada to contact youth and engage them in an ongoing basis in civic education initiatives and to register them in the National Register of Electors on their 18th birthday so as to provide a VIC at election time.
- **Providing the Chief Electoral Officer with tools to continually improve Elections Canada's National Register of Electors,** on which it is estimated there is a very small proportion of people who are not eligible to vote because of their citizenship status. Elections Canada will be able to identify and contact individuals who may not be eligible to vote and verify their status, before removing them from the National Register, if necessary. A bill was introduced in the previous Parliament by the Government of Canada to address this issue, but it did not become law.
- **Bill C-33 would increase public confidence in the independence of the Commissioner of Canada Elections and to foster effective cooperation with Elections Canada.** From 1974 to 2014, the Chief Electoral Officer appointed the Commissioner, who reported to the Chief Electoral Officer within Elections Canada while maintaining a rigorously independent investigation function. The *Fair Elections Act* transferred the Commissioner to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Director reports through the Attorney General to Parliament, unlike the Chief Electoral Officer who reports directly to Parliament. The Government heard from Canadians during the Electoral Reform Dialogue that there were concerns the Commissioner could be subject to less independence. If passed, Bill C-33 would enhance the integrity of the election system by clarifying this situation.

- **Expanding the right to vote to over 1 million Canadians living abroad.** Today, Canadians living abroad may only vote within five years of leaving Canada and must have an intention to return. These restrictions are currently being challenged before the Supreme Court of Canada. If passed, Bill C-33 would remove these barriers to voting and will extend voting rights to these Canadians living abroad. The *Canada Elections Act* will continue to require Canadian citizens to have lived in Canada at one time if they wish to vote.

The Chief Electoral Officer released a report on September 27, 2016, following the 2015 federal election. The report contains over 130 recommendations to improve the administration of elections in the future. That report was studied by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and the Government appreciates their recommendations and advice.

The Government of Canada has also introduced legislation to make political fundraising more open and transparent. If passed, Bill C-50, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing)* will enact an advertising and reporting regime for fundraising events that cost more than \$200 to attend and where Ministers, party leaders or leadership contestants from parties with a seat in the House are present.

Further, the Government is taking steps to protect the integrity of Canada's democracy by defending the Canadian electoral process from hacking and malicious cyber activities. On June 16, 2016, the Government welcomed the Communications Security Establishment's report entitled *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process*. The assessment examines cyber threat activity against the democratic process in Canada and around the world over the past ten years.

Since the release of the report in June, the CSE has reached out to political parties as well as the provincial and territorial chief electoral officers to offer information on how they can protect themselves from cyber-attack.

The Government also remains committed to reviewing proper limits on how much political parties and third parties can spend between and during election campaigns.

The Government also intends to bring forward options to create a new independent commission to organize leaders' debates during elections.

The Government of Canada values the input of all Canadians who take the time to engage. Civic engagement is a cornerstone of our democracy and the Government will continue to listen to Canadians as it takes action to further strengthen our democratic institutions. The Government of Canada encourages Canadians to continue to work with Members of Parliament and the Minister of Democratic Institutions to pursue meaningful opportunities to strengthen and safeguard Canada's democratic institutions.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this issue.