Brief to the Government of Canada's Special Committee on Electoral Reform

October 2016

Submitted by: Stephanie Wolfe on behalf of attendees of a public meeting

On Sept 29, 2016, there was a community dialogue on electoral reform in Alliston, Ontario with 21 participants from the general public. The following questions were discussed with a summary of the responses below.

Discussion Question 1:   Are there things that you like and/or concerns about the alternative voting systems? If so, what? What values and principles do you think ought to be prioritized when designing an electoral system for Canada?

Response: Concerns with current system are that "the losing parties lose big", and that all votes do not count. A more proportional system may encourage participation and more voter engagement because votes are not wasted to the same extent. Some proportional systems are complex so voters would need education on how the new system works**. Simplicity, stability, proportionality and local representation** were named as important values. If the system is too complex, this may turn voters off. One person thought there should be a referendum before changing the electoral system, however, the other twenty people did not agree. An election should produce a legislature that forces more co-operation.

Discussion Question 2: Have you and/or the people you know faced barriers or challenges when voting in the past? If so, what and how can they be overcome? Are there certain groups that you feel are excluded from the current electoral system? If so, why and what can be done?

Response: Seniors, people with disabilities, youth, people without transportation in rural areas, and aboriginal people were all identified as having barriers and/or being under-represented.

Discussion Question 3: How do you feel about online voting? How do you feel about mandatory voting?

Response: Mandatory voting was unanimously rejected because it could be difficult to administer, and the quality of votes may decrease. **Mandatory *education*** on voting would be a great if that could ever be implemented. Online voting was deemed to be a good idea by approximately half of attendees because it may engage younger voters and reduce barriers for those with physical restrictions. The remaining participants were very concerned about the risk of hacking.

Discussion Question 4: What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy? Do you consider Canada's current electoral system to be "fair"? "Inclusive"? "Representative"? Why or why not?

Response: Current system is not representative, nor fair, nor inclusive. There are false majorities, over-representation of white men, and candidacy excludes people of low income. Voters are turned off by attack ads, House of Common's unruly behavior and a feeling that corporations are much more politically powerful than individuals. Perhaps accountability and therefore engagement would increase if we had a **recall system** that could remove an MP or MPP if they do not have the support of their constituency in between elections.   We also need to ensure that high school students are educated on how democracy works in an objective way.