

**Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform from the
Humanist Association of Ottawa**

October 6th, 2016

J.P. Westlund, President, Humanist Association of Ottawa

The Humanist Association of Ottawa supports the implementation, before the next federal election, of the Mixed Member Proportional system proposed by the Law Commission of Canada in their 2004 report; "Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada".

Our membership is pleased with the government's initiative to move Canada towards a more robust democratic system. We represent a more politically engaged portion of Ottawa's population, and the defense of democratic principles of governance and free and open debate is one of our most cherished values.

Most Canadians believe that our first-past-the-post system is archaic, and that Canadian democracy would be better served by a system that introduces proportionality to voting. The Mixed Member Proportional system would strengthen our democracy by having the composition of parliament more closely reflecting the electoral will of the Canadian people. The current system makes our population appear more regionally politically divided than it really is, and a proportional system would show in the House of Commons that the major parties enjoy support across the country.

The ability, with Mixed Member Proportional, to cast votes for both a local candidate, and a regional candidate or party, gives the voter more choice. Having two votes, they could vote for a local candidate from one party with the first vote and also vote for a different party in the second, regional section of the ballot, if they wished to do so.

Another advantage of the Mixed Member Proportional system is that it doesn't increase the size of parliament, which would likely not sit well with taxpayers if that were the case. Many ridings would increase moderately in size (compared with the larger increases needed for Stephane Dion's "P3" system) but people would still be confident in knowing that they were electing a local candidate to represent their area's unique needs. This also means that some of the feel of first past the post is retained, which could make the transition to a

system involving proportionality more palatable to the populace.

A referendum, although it will be demanded by those who oppose the change to a system with proportionality, should be avoided if possible. In the 2015 federal election, four of the five seat-winning parties ran on a platform that included change to the electoral system, and they collectively won the majority of the popular vote. Viewed with this in mind, a referendum is an unjustified expense to the taxpayer that would jeopardize the possibility of electoral reform.

In conclusion, we should point out that though we believe that the Mixed Member Proportional system proposed by the Law Commission of Canada is the best voting system for our country in the next election, we would be pleased with other systems that introduce a measure of proportionality, such as the others endorsed by Fair Vote Canada. We agree broadly with Fair Vote Canada's "Submission to the Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform".

Thank you for accepting our submission, and for your efforts to give each Canadian a stronger voice in our democratic system.

About the Humanist Association of Ottawa:

In operation since 1968, the Humanist Association of Ottawa is a secular community group whose mission is to promote the cause of humanism, foster the humanist community in Ottawa, and advocate for a secular public domain.