

15 February 2018

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: pjcis@aph.gov.au

Re: ECCV Submission on the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill 2017*

Dear Committee Secretary

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak advocacy body for over 240 members representing ethnic and multicultural organisations and is the voice of multicultural Victoria.

ECCV understands that the Australian Government is attempting to reduce undue foreign influence over political debate in Australia. It has come to our attention, however, that a number of community organisations and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds could unwittingly be affected by some of the provisions of the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill 2017*. We understand that, as currently proposed, the Bill will require all organisations or individuals undertaking a range of specified activities on behalf "foreign principals" to register as "foreign agents". ECCV believes that the Bill will therefore significantly hinder the ability of these parties to campaign and raise awareness on issues of significant importance to Australian society.

As almost half of the Australian population was either born overseas, or has at least one parent that was born overseas, a large number of Australian residents could discover that they have to register as foreign agents in order to continue their work for positive societal outcomes. ECCV believes that the nature of the Bill and the currently recommended very broad definition of "foreign principals" mean that multicultural organisations and culturally diverse community members will be disproportionately affected. We believe that a broad definition of foreign agency will make the important community work of multicultural organisations more challenging and difficult.

ECCV is particularly concerned that the Bill will hinder the ability of multicultural peak policy advocacy organisations (such as ECCV) and our member organisations to run positive campaigns and

advocacy initiatives to improve social integration and achieve positive settlement outcomes. Many permanent and temporary visa holders have made and continue to make hugely productive and beneficial contributions to Australian society. However, this Bill is likely to introduce significant obstacles that will discourage these community members from working on and promoting vital campaigns for advancing and improving Australia's society. ECCV believes that the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill 2017*, as currently proposed, overreaches in its attempts to prevent foreign influence over political debate.

ECCV therefore recommends that the Bill not proceed further without additional consultation with all relevant community organisations and stakeholders.

For further information please contact James Houghton, ECCV Policy Officer, on (03) 9354 9555 or jhoughton@eccv.org.au.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Pavlidis', written in a cursive style.

Kris Pavlidis
Chairperson