



15 September 2021

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Leader, ACT Labor

Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA
Leader, Canberra Liberals

Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA
Leader, ACT Greens

CALL TO RE-ESTABLISH SELECT COMMITTEE ON COVID-19

We are writing to you, as leaders of your respective parties, to call on the ACT Legislative Assembly to convene a Select Committee to examine issues arising from the present COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT and associated government responses.

At the start of the pandemic last year, the previous Assembly unanimously agreed to establish a Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response, which provided vital and timely scrutiny of the government's early responses to the unfolding threat of COVID-19 in the ACT. Before it was dissolved at the end of 2020, the committee recommended that a successor committee be established in the 10th Assembly for the length of the declared COVID emergency.

As independent statutory officeholders responsible for upholding the welfare and rights of all people in the ACT, we are seeing pressing outbreak related issues and concerns emerge which ought to warrant the Assembly's attention and scrutiny. A human rights-based approach anticipates that emergency powers exercised by government must continue to be carefully monitored so that any disproportionate or inadvertent impacts are quickly identified and corrected. It is equally, if not more, important now in the current lockdown that emergency measures and their effects are accountable to public scrutiny, interrogation, and debate by the Assembly.

A Select Committee process would give members of the community, businesses and civil society a valuable opportunity to share their concerns and feedback and a way to directly participate in the democratic process. It would provide much needed transparency and ongoing scrutiny of government actions at a time when the inevitable concentration of power in the executive has the potential to weaken democratic deliberation.

Recognising that significant public health restrictions will remain necessary for some time to come yet, we urge the ACT Legislative Assembly to reconvene a Select Committee to monitor the issues, impacts and measures arising from the current outbreak.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Helen Watchirs OAM
President and Human
Rights Commissioner

Jodie Griffiths-Cook
Public Advocate and
Children and Young
People Commissioner

Karen Toohey
Discrimination, Health
Services, and Disability
and Community Services
Commissioner

Heidi Yates
Victims of Crime
Commissioner