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**Vision Australia Government Relations and Policy Team**

**Julie McKay**

**Marcus Bleechmore**

Dear Julie and Marcus,

It is with pleasure that we submit our response to your ‘Vision Australia’s 2016 Federal Election Priorities’ document.

**Invitation to Commit to Blindness and Low Vision Community**

I have been asked to respond on behalf of all candidates for Mature Australia Party to your 2016 Federal Election Priorities document. While the majority of my responses are on behalf of the party, I have included some personal beliefs so that you may gain a better understanding of what Mature Australia is all about. I have indicated my personal beliefs as such in order to clearly identify them. My name is Darryl Bothe and I am a Senate Candidate for South Australia.

Mature Australia Party is a party of inclusion and not one of exclusion. As such, we believe that every person in Australia deserves the right to equal opportunities. Traditionally Australia has focussed on the requirements of the majority in whatever form this may take. If we call this majority Able Bodied People for a term of reference only, and refer to anyone who is not like this as Disabled, then we tend to view disabled people as somewhat different. I know you know this already, but I am just trying to set up a frame of reference.

We don’t view people as people with a disability or able bodied because everybody has some challenge in their everyday lives. Some are physical challenges like lack of sight, some have lack of hearing and as a consequence find it difficult to speak. Some have mental challenges just to be able to go outside of their homes, some have difficulty in understanding simple or complex issues or social aspects of interaction. And many have multiple challenges including people in your group.

The Mature Australia Party IS committed to be ALL INCLUSIVE in our party and in our governance should our candidates be elected to office. And to show the consideration that we will be taking, I have chosen to voice record this letter for the benefit of those that are able to hear it. While we don’t have our policies in voice recorded form as yet, your letter has highlighted this and we will endeavour to rectify it as soon as possible. However, we are and have already been working in this direction on our Digital Radio station where our candidates are broadcasting their messages in voice recorded format. Our digital radio station is available on our website under our Media button.

**Employment**

While it would be easy for me to simply say that we will work towards your targets of matching the participation rates in the employment sector, we are unable to make that commitment. However, what we can commit to is ensuring that all people regardless of life challenges will be treated and considered equally by our elected representatives. I can also assure you that your organisation and community would be consulted on employment issues to ensure that any life challenge experienced by your group is considered and not discriminated against at any time.

**Education**

We understand and agree that education is a clear path to meaningful employment. Likewise, for all aspects of society, regardless of life challenges that each person experiences. We also agree that it is critical that the Commonwealth Government demonstrates strong leadership in working with the States to ensure that ALL students have equitable access to ALL equipment required to support the best possible learning outcomes. And we commit to working toward a National Community of total inclusion for all people regardless of life challenges they face.

**My Personal Belief regarding Education**

Our education system was designed centuries ago for what can only be referred to as Able bodied people. However, over the last 50 years, education experts have conducted much research into what it means to be able to learn and methods of learning. We live in an Audio Visual age and as such, our education system is adapting to this, albeit slowly.

What I propose is that children should not be required to learn to read with their eyes if they choose not to. They should have choices to learn to read with their fingers or ears or any combination of these senses. Communication is an important aspect to learning and how those concepts are communicated should be as wide ranging as the communications themselves. This of course, would require a full re-design of our education system which would be an undertaking of enormous proportions. However, I believe that for Australia to lead the way in the education sector, we need to re-think education from ground up using the knowledge that we have gained and further research that we can conduct.

**Supporting Senior’s Access to Blindness and Low Vision Services**

We understand that seniors face challenges that are distinctly different from those of the younger generations. If this is coupled with sight challenges at the same time, regardless of whether the sight challenge has been long term or recent loss of sight, there are additional challenges for these people and their carers. We do commit to working closely with all aged care providers to ascertain appropriate levels of aids and equipment to assist people to live a better quality of life in whatever form that may take. And if required we will seek funding for research into the requirements of specialty care facilities. Specialty care facilities should perhaps be available to all aged care providers. However, further research may very well indicate that specialist care providers are required and, in that case, we would continue investigating these possibilities and explore any and all options in this area. Our purpose would be to create a better quality of life for all Australians under any circumstances.

**Mandate Audio Description on Australian Free to Air Television**

While we would most definitely investigate the funding of such services for sight challenged people through Audio Description, we would also propose that alternative entertainment be available for anyone who would like to access this medium. Since the 1950s, television has been an integral part of daily lives for many Australians, but as a medium for conveying information and entertainment, it has lost ground to other forms of information dissemination and entertainment.

**Introduce Accessible Voting through iVote**

Mature Australia recognises the challenges to confidential voting rights of all Australians and as such would support investigation of any voting system that ensured security of the vote itself, the privacy of the voter and the validity of the vote. Upon brief research into the iVote system, it appears that it could work for Federal Elections, but we would refer to appropriate authorities for final analysis.

We trust that we have addressed the components of your request and hope that you and your community can find relevance in our response.

Regards,

Darryl Bothe

Senate Candidate for South Australia

On behalf of Mature Australia