



Parliamentarian Code of Conduct must reflect public values of integrity and respect

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Today, advocacy groups, integrity experts and sexual violence services have released a joint statement calling on the Federal Government to deliver a Parliamentarian Code of Conduct that will ensure respect and integrity in the Parliament.

The Parliamentary Standards Committee is currently drafting a Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians, due to be handed down on 1 December.

“Our organisations are concerned about the reports of violence and discrimination in Parliament. A strong Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians is one of the best ways to ensure the Parliament models values of respect and integrity, as well as makes clear that violence, inequity and discrimination have no place in our Parliament.” said Alyssa Shaw, Campaign Manager for Fair Agenda.

“When parliamentarians fail to behave in accordance with basic levels of respect and integrity, the damage they inflict is far-reaching. Parliament needs a code of conduct that explicitly references racism, gender-based violence, ableism and other forms of discrimination, to ensure our leaders are held to the same standards as everyone else in the community,” said Alice Drury, Acting Legal Director, Human Rights Law Centre.

It has been one year since the ‘Set the Standard’ report on parliamentary workplace conduct and culture was handed down.

Australian Democracy Network, Democracy in Colour, Fair Agenda, Human Rights Law Centre, the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV) and Transparency International Australia have come together to demand the Parliamentary Code of Conduct address issues of violence and discrimination.

“Based on Commissioner Jenkins reports we know that many people working in the Parliament have experienced sexual violence. Parliament is a workplace, but it is also the heart of our democracy. Our Parliament must continue to support survivors, but we also need our leaders to deliver a strong Code that sends a clear message: that sexual violence is unacceptable” said Joanne Sheehan-Paterson, Chair of National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV).

“To ensure respect in the Parliamentary workplace, a strong Code must explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of ability, age, gender, intersex status, race, religion and sexual orientation. As Australia’s population becomes more diverse, our representatives have a responsibility to ensure that racial justice is embedded in our governance. The Code of Conduct has enormous potential to lead the way and set the standard for racial justice as well as gender justice,” said Shae Flanagan, racial justice advocate for Democracy in Colour.

“Parliamentarians are role models to our community. To ensure that this Code is fit for purpose it must apply to all conduct that relates to a parliamentarians duties and responsibilities - both professional, and sometimes, personal: in cases where this conduct is damaging to their role as representatives. The behaviours of Parliamentarians must reflect the values and high expectations of national leaders and representatives at all times,” said Alyssa Shaw.

“We want to see a strong, representative democracy that exemplifies the values of Australia. We want to see our Parliament act with integrity and respect in service to our community. We need a Parliamentary Code of Conduct that reflects these aspirations” said Saffron Zomer, Executive Director of Australian Democracy Network

“This is an opportunity for the Parliament to set a high standard for Australia, and for the conduct we will accept” - Clancy Moore, CEO of Transparency International Australia.

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Background: Joint Statement (on next page)

Joint Statement: Parliamentarian Code of Conduct must reflect public values of integrity and respect

Australians want a Parliament that is safe, and that models respect and integrity.

A strong Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians is one of the best ways to achieve this.

By creating clear, consistent rules that our representatives are bound by, we can create a Parliament that we can all be proud of.

Right now, the Parliamentary Standards Committee has been tasked with considering and drafting this Parliamentary Code of Conduct.

Our organisations are concerned about the reports of violence, discrimination and issues of integrity in Parliament.

We want to see a strong, representative democracy that exemplifies the values of Australia. We want to see our Parliament act with integrity and respect in service to our community.

We come together to call on this Committee, and our Parliament, to deliver a strong Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians that will meet the public expectation and restore trust and confidence in our democracy.

This is an opportunity for the Parliament to set a high standard for Australia, and for the conduct we will accept.

The Federal Parliament must take action to ensure a Code that: reflects high standards consistently across the Parliament, adopts proper processes when issues are raised, and ultimately, succeeds in restoring public confidence.

To be successful, this Code of Conduct must meet public expectations, and not repeat the mistakes of the past that led us to this point.

This means a Code of Conduct must:

- Explicitly prohibit discrimination and exclude behaviours that are unacceptable in any workplace, especially our Parliament. To address this, the Code itself must include protected attributes under current discrimination law, which include: ability, age, gender, intersex status, race, religion and sexual orientation. The Code can be supported by detailed policies that sit beneath it, and these policies can reference other attributes and other bases for discrimination that can be developed by the Commission over time.
- Include values that reflect what Australians expect: respect, integrity and a commitment to public service.

- Apply to all conduct that relates to a parliamentarian's duties and responsibilities - both professional, and sometimes, personal: in cases where this conduct is damaging to their role as representatives. Parliamentarians are role models to our community. This means that their behaviour must reflect the values and high expectations of national leaders and representatives at all times.

To have confidence that Parliamentarians will be held to these standards, there must be:

- An Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission staffed with people with lived experience and experts in trauma informed care, with power to investigate alleged breaches of the Code and to make public findings and recommendations.
- A Parliamentary Code of Conduct that is put into legislation – to ensure there is one set of rules for everyone.

We, the undersigned, ask the Committee and the Parliament, to deliver a Code of Conduct that delivers on these requirements and meets the public expectation.

Australian Democracy Network

Democracy in Colour

Fair Agenda

Human Rights Law Centre

National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV)

Transparency International Australia

