

MEDIA RELEASE

11 November 2024

Reducing misconduct risks in MP's electorate offices.

A report by the Corruption and Crime Commission tabled in Parliament today highlights the risk of public resources being misused in the electorate offices of Members of Parliament.

A Commission investigation revealed electorate officers – paid through the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) – were routinely undertaking political campaigning during working hours and were being trained to do so during those hours.

The explanation was that the time was made up outside of standard hours. However, there are no systems or records to prove or disprove that explanation.

Around 190 full-time equivalent electorate officers are publicly funded by over \$17 million annually to serve the constituency and if even some of their time is spent campaigning instead, it is a misuse of public funds and an unfair advantage to the sitting Member.

A Member who knowingly allows an electorate officer to campaign politically, at the expense of legitimate constituent work, in order to gain a benefit for that Member runs a risk of committing serious misconduct.

“The community should be able to have faith that any of its elected members will not misuse public resources for party-political purposes,” said Commissioner John McKechnie. “And Members of Parliament have a responsibility to manage their electorate offices so that they can demonstrate that.”

Improper use of electorate officers for political campaigning is a risk to fair elections. A sitting candidate who uses the State resource of electorate officers for political campaigning has an unfair advantage over other candidates who do not have access to that resource.

The Commission has made a series of recommendations to ameliorate the misconduct risk, protect the public purse and support good government. Those recommendations include DPC making it unmistakably clear that it does not permit electorate officers to engage in party-political work, including campaigning and training to campaign, during electorate office hours; and providing a data management system for constituent matters. It also recommends a procedure is implemented by DPC to track the use of time by electorate officers.

It welcomes the DPC's current planning to improve transparency and accountability.

Of course, voluntary campaigning by electorate officers in their own time is part of the democratic process. The present serious misconduct risk arises because in some electorate offices, it is unclear

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whether an officer is campaigning in their own time or while being paid by the State to do constituent work.

The Commission also investigated an allegation that the G2G pass applications (part of the border control system in place during the COVID 19 pandemic) of WA Labor party donors and Labor Business Roundtable members were given preferential treatment. There was no evidence before the Commission to support the allegation.

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