

TOWARD A STRONGER DEMOCRACY IN BC

First Report of the
Special Committee on
Democratic and Electoral Reform

November 2025



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

First Session, 43rd Parliament



November 26, 2025

To the Honourable the
Legislative Assembly of the
Province of British Columbia

Honourable Members:

I have the honour to present herewith the First Report of the Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform for the First Session of the 43rd Parliament. This report covers the Committee's work in regard to democratic engagement, voter participation, and electoral reform as approved by the Committee.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

Jennifer Blatherwick, MLA
Chair

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

MEMBERS

Jennifer Blatherwick, MLA, **Chair** (*Member from September 12, 2025; Chair from September 15, 2025*)
Coquitlam-Maillardville

Ward Stamer, MLA, **Deputy Chair**
Kamloops-North Thompson

George Anderson, MLA
Nanaimo-Lantzville

Rohini Arora, MLA (*from September 12, 2025*)
Burnaby East

Rob Botterell, MLA
Saanich North and the Islands

Dallas Brodie, MLA (*from September 12, 2025*)
Vancouver-Quilchena

Sheldon Clare, MLA
Prince George-North Cariboo

Amna Shah, MLA (*Chair July 18-September 15, 2025*)
Surrey City Centre

Hon. Jessie Sunner, MLA (*Chair to July 18; Member to September 12, 2025*)
Surrey-Newton

Qwulti'stunaat / Debra Toporowski, MLA
Cowichan Valley

COMMITTEE STAFF

Karan Riarh, Committee Clerk

Katey Stickle, Senior Research Analyst

Jared Brown and Mary Heeg, Committee Research Analysts

Aza Bryson, Jonathon Hamilton, Hanna Kim, and Danielle Migeon, Committee Researchers

Alexa Neufeld, Parliamentary Committees Officer

Emily Andrews and Kayla Wilson, Committees Coordinators

TERMS OF REFERENCE

On April 9, 2025, the Legislative Assembly agreed that a Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform be appointed to:

1. Examine and make recommendations related to:
 - a. increasing democratic engagement and voter participation, and
 - b. models for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly, including proportional representation and report to the House thereon by November 26, 2025.
2. Review the administration of the 43rd provincial general election, including consideration of the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 43rd provincial general election, and make recommendations for improvements for future elections, and report to the House thereon by May 14, 2026.

That the Special Committee have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and in addition be empowered to:

- a. appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Special Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;
- b. sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- c. conduct consultations by any means the Special Committee considers appropriate;
- d. adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and,
- e. retain personnel as required to assist the Special Committee.

That during a period of adjournment, the Special Committee deposit its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, or in the next following Session, as the case may be, the Chair present all reports to the House.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Legislative Assembly empowered the Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform (the “Committee”) to examine and make recommendations related to democratic engagement, voter participation, and electoral reform on April 9, 2025. To inform its work, the Committee received a briefing from Elections BC and collected input through a public consultation, with options to speak at a public meeting or provide a written submission. During this process, the Committee heard from 987 participants. Committee Members express their sincere gratitude to everyone who participated in the Committee’s consultation.

This report includes a comprehensive summary of the knowledge, ideas, experience, and perspectives shared with the Committee, the Committee’s discussions which led to its recommendations, and the Committee’s recommendations. The report is organized by theme; the numbering of recommendations does not indicate priority.

The Committee makes 36 recommendations for consideration by the Legislative Assembly, the provincial government, the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, and Elections BC. These recommendations are designed to strengthen BC’s democracy by supporting British Columbians’ engagement and participation, examining the efficacy of legislation and policy, and enhancing the responsibilities of and resources for Elections BC, political parties, and MLAs. The Committee recognizes that strengthening the province’s democracy requires additional investments and resources across government as well as for Elections BC and the Legislative Assembly. Additionally, Committee Members acknowledge that accountability and transparency are fundamental democratic principles and that measures to reinforce these principles are critical to maintaining a vibrant democracy.

Committee Members emphasize the importance of engaging the public to support participation in democratic processes, highlighting the need for proactive democratic engagement efforts undertaken by reputable, non-partisan bodies. To undertake this work, the Committee recommends that the

Legislative Assembly establish a centre of excellence for democratic engagement to develop resources that support local engagement, public learning, and consultation. With respect to public consultation, Members identify a need to enhance existing processes by ensuring proactive and early engagement, providing transparent and responsive communication, releasing results in a timely manner, leveraging technology, and empowering youth.

The Committee heard about a number of issues related to the electoral information environment. Members recommend that the provincial government collaborate with Elections BC and the federal government to review existing legislative and regulatory measures related to misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech during elections, including mechanisms to ensure the timely removal of harmful content. To better address challenges associated with social media and emergent technologies such as artificial intelligence, Members recommend establishing a working group to propose amendments to BC’s privacy and election legislation. Committee Members identify a need to strengthen protections and support for electoral candidates and their family members experiencing harassment, abuse, and other forms of online harms. To better protect all users, the Committee recommends requiring digital platforms to act with a duty of care and establish clear safety-related requirements such as data privacy, platform design, and content policy. The Committee also heard about concerns regarding foreign interference, and recommends that these be considered by the Electoral Integrity Working Group.

The Committee heard about the critical importance of civic education to ensure the public’s understanding of democratic institutions, processes, and participation. The Committee recommends strengthening civic education in the K-12 school system with input from experts and a greater emphasis on applied learning. Committee Members also suggest adapting and incorporating best practices regarding media literacy, critical thinking, and misinformation education as well as prioritizing funding for professional

development for educators. To enhance civic education for all ages, the Committee recommends assigning Elections BC formal responsibility for leading non-partisan education initiatives and administering grants dedicated to non-partisan community civic engagement programs.

Committee Members reflected on voter participation trends in recent provincial general elections and recommend assigning Elections BC formal responsibility for increasing voter turnout. To further support this objective, the Committee suggests enhancing data collection by requiring proactive enumeration on an annual basis and ensuring that registered parties and candidates can access poll-by-poll results. Additionally, Members agree that Elections BC should review and improve voter registration practices and communication, as well as access to and public awareness of voting opportunities. With respect to expanding voter eligibility, the Committee supports further examination of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds as well as permanent residents in BC.

The Committee heard about several issues relating to campaigning and campaign finance. Members support reviewing the timeliness and efficacy of Elections BC's enforcement powers in this area to ensure they are sufficient. To enhance accountability and transparency, expand access to voters, and increase access to information, Committee Members recommend modernizing the candidate nominator verification process, requiring Elections BC to collect and share voters' contact information with registered political parties and candidates, and strengthening measures related to access to multi-unit buildings for candidates and their campaigns.

The Committee reflected on the importance of parliamentary democracy, the work of the Legislative Assembly, and the need to ensure that MLAs have the tools they need to do their jobs. Members highlight the work done by the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture in the 42nd Parliament and agree that re-establishing the Working Group would provide opportunities to strengthen collaboration, inclusivity, and accessibility in parliamentary spaces. Committee Members also identified the need to evaluate the effective use of parliamentary resources including collaborative work undertaken by parliamentary committees, the advancement of legislative initiatives through Private Members' Business, and the sufficiency and equity of Members' remuneration and allowances, and the funding formula for caucuses and independent Members. To strengthen regulation and oversight of political parties, the Committee recommends authorizing

Elections BC to oversee the administration of the election of party leaders and evaluating stronger privacy provisions related to political parties.

The Committee received significant input related to retaining or changing electoral systems, the opportunities and challenges presented by each electoral system, and how electoral reform could unfold should BC proceed in that direction. The Committee acknowledges that altering the electoral system, a key component of BC's democracy, requires further conversations with British Columbians to ensure there is support for and public trust in any potential changes. With this in mind, the Committee recommends that government consider establishing a peoples' assembly to examine and make recommendations on the model for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly. Additionally, the Committee recommends that the provincial government consult local governments to determine the level of interest in alternative electoral systems for their communities.

THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

On April 9, 2025, the Legislative Assembly agreed that the Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform be empowered to examine and make recommendations related to democratic engagement, voter participation, and electoral reform. Additionally, the Committee was empowered to review the administration of the 43rd provincial general election. This report is limited to the first part of the Committee’s mandate; work regarding the second part of its mandate is ongoing.

To begin its work, the Committee received a briefing from Elections BC on June 5, 2025. This briefing provided background information and context on voter engagement and participation in past provincial elections, an overview of different electoral systems and the history of electoral reform in BC, and some considerations with regards to changing electoral systems.

British Columbians were invited to share their input by appearing at a public hearing or by submitting a written submission. The Committee accepted written submissions between June 16 and July 25, 2025 and held public meetings between July 7 and July 18, 2025. Public hearings were held virtually using the Zoom videoconferencing platform and in-person in Vancouver, Prince George, Cranbrook, Kelowna, Surrey, and Victoria.

Several approaches were used to encourage participation in the consultation, including: a media release; advertisements in local and multicultural newspapers; online advertisements; social media; and direct outreach to Members of the Legislative Assembly, constituency offices, stakeholders, local government associations, Indigenous leadership organizations, and First Nations.

In total, the Committee received input from 987 participants, including 186 presentations and 801 standalone written submissions. A list of the individuals and organizations that participated in the Committee’s consultation is available in Appendix A.

Following the consultation period, the Committee met to carefully consider all input received and develop recommendations. The Committee took a broad approach to interpreting its mandate. As such, there may be overlap between this report and the Committee’s consideration of the administration of the 43rd provincial general election. While the Committee accepted and considered interconnected perspectives as part of this report, it agreed to consider submissions exclusively about the 43rd provincial general election in the next phase of its work.

MEETING SCHEDULE

1st Session, 43rd Parliament

April 16, 2025	Election of Chair and Deputy Chair, Planning
May 7, 2025	Planning
June 5, 2025	Briefings, Planning
June 10, 2025	Planning
July 7, 2025	Public Hearing (Vancouver)
July 8, 2025	Public Hearing (Vancouver)
July 9, 2025	Public Hearing (Prince George)
July 9, 2025	Public Hearing (Cranbrook)
July 10, 2025	Public Hearing (Kelowna)
July 11, 2025	Public Hearing (Surrey)
July 14, 2025	Public Hearing (Victoria and Virtual)
July 15, 2025	Public Hearing (Victoria and Virtual)
July 16, 2025	Public Hearing (Victoria and Virtual)
July 17, 2025	Public Hearing (Virtual)
July 18, 2025	Election of Chair, Public Hearing (Virtual), Deliberations

September 15, 2025 Election of Chair, Deliberations
September 16, 2025 Deliberations
September 17, 2025 Deliberations
September 18, 2025 Deliberations
October 8, 2025 Deliberations
October 9, 2025 Deliberations
October 29, 2025 Deliberations
November 7, 2025 Deliberations
November 17, 2025 Deliberations, Adoption of the Report

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Multiple organizations and individuals shared concerns with the Committee on the state of democratic engagement and the level of trust in democratic institutions in BC, and opportunities to improve democratic engagement. Participants made recommendations on participatory democracy, including the use of mini-publics, citizens' assemblies, and provincial public policy conferences. The Committee also heard about direct democracy, consultations, and funding opportunities to increase democratic engagement.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The Committee heard from multiple organizations and individuals who indicated that participating in democracy should involve more than just voting in elections. The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue recommended developing a robust strategy to mainstream public participation in government decision-making. The Centre indicated that this could include fostering dialogue to reduce polarization on issues such as forestry, conservation, wildfires, toxic drug supply, and public health.

The Committee heard from participants who recommended different methods of participatory democracy to increase democratic engagement. Individuals highlighted that advisory councils, participatory budgeting, and citizens' assemblies could produce better decisions and foster trust between government and the people it serves, and noted that embracing innovative methods in democracy can include providing food and childcare at public meetings, paying people for their time, and using digital and hybrid engagement options. Dr. Maxwell Cameron of the University of British Columbia recommended establishing deliberation days for communities to debate policy issues. Dr. Peter Dietsch, Dr. Avigail Eisenberg, and Dr. Colin Macleod of the University of Victoria recommended incorporating sortition, which refers to the selection of political representatives by lottery, into BC's democratic system. The group highlighted that sortition can improve representation and could be integrated into the current political system by having two chambers: one whose

members are selected at the ballot box and the other relying on sortition.

MINI-PUBLICS

Participants also shared the benefits of mini-publics for improving democratic engagement. The BC Society for Policy Solutions described a mini-public as a space within which a diverse body of citizens are selected randomly to deliberate on an issue of public concern. The Society explained that mini-publics are more representative than most consultation processes due to random selection and give citizens the time and resources to engage in good faith and informed deliberation. Examples include Oregon's citizen-initiated referendum model, which includes a citizens' jury, as well as Burnaby's recent community assembly model and the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation. The Society recommended actively incorporating the mini-public model in the province's toolkit for democratic engagement and policymaking. Dr. Sarah Wiebe of the University of Victoria similarly recommended that the government enact policy co-design through mini-public deliberations, from citizens' assemblies to policy design labs.

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue additionally advocated for mini-publics, stating that BC should bring together a mini-public that is demographically representative of British Columbians, selected by civic lottery, and have them go through a learning process and develop recommendations to put forward to the Legislative Assembly. The Centre highlighted that bringing together a mini-public would demonstrate that government is listening to citizens and acting on their voices.

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES AND FORUMS

The Committee received several recommendations to increase the use of citizens' assemblies. Individuals and organizations recommended using citizens' assemblies to help resolve complex issues, to represent the people of BC in strategic and

financial planning of the province, and to deepen democratic engagement on environmental issues and sustainable policy challenges.

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue noted that the BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, formed in 2003, was the first ever citizens' assembly globally. The Centre stated that the mandate of a new citizens' assembly could be to make recommendations to enhance democratic renewal and resilience more broadly or to make targeted recommendations to resolve tensions or trade-offs for a specific law or issue. The Centre highlighted that there must be explicit commitment from government to respond to an assembly's recommendations.

One individual stated that implementing citizens' assemblies for key public policy challenges can bridge the gap between citizens and complex decision-making, building trust and shared understanding. Another individual shared their belief that citizens' assemblies are underutilized in BC and Canada and could be used for a variety of key issues such as affordability, housing, the toxic drug and overdose crisis, homelessness, climate change, truth and reconciliation, and health care. The individual further shared that the assemblies should consist of a representative group of constituents, be given a large amount of high-quality information and discussions with experts, and their recommendations should be adopted by government.

Dr. Wiebe noted that the language of "citizens" in citizens' assemblies can be a barrier. Policy issues affect residents and newcomers, and these spaces of democracy need to be inclusive to these residents as well. As such, Dr. Wiebe recommended that the language used regarding any citizens' assemblies be inclusive to non-citizen residents and newcomers.

PROVINCIAL PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCES

Dr. Maxwell Cameron of the University of British Columbia spoke to the Committee about provincial public policy conferences, suggesting that BC should consider a public policy conference model like Brazil to bring together civil society and government representatives to discuss policy issues. These would be convened by Cabinet and organized by an arm's length public policy council. A series of dialogue roundtables would be held in municipalities and regions across the province, with participants selected from relevant organizations or self-selected. The participants in these

meetings would then choose delegates to serve as their ambassadors to a provincial policy conference which would make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Dr. Cameron highlighted that this model honours and respects the separation of powers and the rule of law, and takes the deliberative process out of the control of political parties and embeds it within BC's democratic institutions. Further, Dr. Cameron noted the model would engage both rural and urban communities and could reduce polarization.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The Committee heard from several individuals who highlighted the benefits of practices that support direct democracy. Individuals shared that citizens feel disconnected from policy decisions between elections, and recommended that government expand the use of referenda, including ones initiated by citizens, on major policy decisions. Individuals recommended that representatives be bound to enact the decisions from the results of referenda or other forms of citizen input. Participants also recommended that MLAs be required to host town halls or hold riding-wide referenda to vote on major legislation.

The Committee also heard from one individual regarding the initiative section of the *Recall and Initiative Act*. The individual noted that the initiative portion of the Act has not been used in almost three decades, with the exception of the 2010 HST initiative, as the requirement to collect signatures on paper is highly onerous. The *Recall and Initiative Act* requires 10 percent of voters to sign an initiative petition, and the individual recommended lowering this threshold and allowing for digital signature collection to lower the barrier for citizens to provide their opinion on legislation.

CONSULTATION

The Committee heard from several organizations and individuals about the importance of public consultations for democratic engagement, and opportunities for improvement. One individual stated that current public consultation processes are often perceived as tokenistic, inaccessible, or designed to legitimize predetermined outcomes. Democracy Watch recommended enacting a meaningful public consultation law that requires broad, in-depth public consultation with voters before any government or government institution makes a significant decision. Several individuals recommended including proactive

engagement with citizens at the early stages of policy development, using diverse methodologies, and transparent and responsive communication. The Committee also received recommendations for using technology such as e-petitions or online webinars to facilitate participation. Multiple individuals emphasized that any public consultation needs to be inclusive of different ethnic or cultural groups, and that consultation participation should be easy, intuitive and clearly connected to issues that people care about. Further, information regarding the topic being consulted on should be easy to access and understand.

The Committee also heard about the importance of including youth in public consultations. CityHive Youth Engagement Society stated that young people are often treated as peripheral to democracy, seen as future voters instead of current stakeholders. The Society stated that young people in BC face structural barriers to participating in public service and accessing leadership opportunities. The Society recommended intentionally supporting youth participation in public consultation processes, providing mentorship and internship opportunities to facilitate meaningful involvement from diverse youth, and creating a standing youth advisory body or roles within key provincial ministries. The BC Federation of Students recommended government work with the Federation and other similar organizations to understand student interests, attract students' attention, connect with students, and target youth and students more in any kind of media related to elections. Other participants noted that despite the perception that young people are viewed as politically apathetic, many young people are taking part in protests regarding issues such as economic justice, climate, and civil rights.

FUNDING

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Democratic Engagement Exchange, Apathy is Boring, and North Shore Community Resources recommended creating a BC Fund for Democratic Resilience and Renewal. Multiple organizations stated that the fund could bolster democratic participation by funding democratic innovation, civic education, inclusive participation, community-led engagement, and outreach to new and infrequent voters. The Democratic Engagement Exchange highlighted that possible recipients could include libraries, settlement agencies, YMCAs and YWCAs, and community centres.

Ethelo recommended creating a fund to support democratic innovation and digital engagement processes, noting that ministries and local governments could apply for funding to undertake democratic processes, including use of citizens' assemblies or large digital engagements.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

The Committee received several other suggestions about how to improve democratic engagement more generally. Apathy is Boring recommended establishing a provincial day of democracy to serve as an annual opportunity to reflect on democratic values, celebrate BC's institutions, and encourage participation, noting the UN's International Day of Democracy as an example. The Samara Centre for Democracy discussed the possibility of the Legislative Library of BC, in collaboration with experts, developing non-partisan local engagement, public learning, and consultation supports, including tools for citizen reference panels, policy development, youth councils, and technology-enhanced town halls. Further, the Samara Centre recommended establishing a centre of excellence for democratic engagement housed within the Legislative Library to support and focus MLAs and their staff on democratic engagement. One individual suggested using Canada's rank in subsequent Democracy Index rankings along with voter turnout in future elections as quantitative metrics to evaluate the health of Canada's democracy. Dr. Wiebe recommended that the government create a multi-pronged democratic reform public engagement strategy.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Members noted the importance of engaging the public to ensure participation in democratic processes. Members acknowledged the potential costs associated with recommendations on enhancing public engagement efforts, while also highlighting that democracy has a cost and should be appropriately resourced. Committee Members emphasized the importance of proactive democratic engagement efforts being undertaken by trustworthy, non-partisan bodies. Committee Members acknowledged that while engagement efforts are important, members of the public also have a responsibility to inform themselves and to be active participants as democratic engagement is a lifelong process.

The Committee expressed interest in the idea of a centre of excellence housed in the Legislative Assembly to lead research, education, and engagement efforts. Members

indicated that any engagement undertaken or informed by the centre of excellence should be multi-pronged, and should engage experts and underrepresented groups, including youth, racialized, and Indigenous communities. Members suggested that a centre of excellence could make use of quantitative data, such as Canada's rank in Democracy Index rankings along with voter turnout in future elections, to evaluate the health of BC's democracy. The centre could also examine and provide guidance on forms of participatory democracy, including mini-publics and peoples' assemblies, as possible avenues for engaging the public. Additionally, the Committee indicated that the centre of excellence could improve communication with the public, providing accessible information and media aimed at people from diverse backgrounds, communities, and ages, as well as provide resources and supports to MLAs. In addition to the specific areas of focus the Committee identified for the centre of excellence, Members also indicated that the centre should have discretion in how it carries out its work so that it can effectively identify the best methods for democratic engagement. Members emphasized that the centre of excellence should have a review or accountability mechanism, to ensure that it is effectively achieving its mandate.

Additionally, Members discussed the agreement between the federal government and Canada Post which allows letters addressed to Members of Parliament to be delivered postage-free. The Committee agreed that extending such a program to include BC MLAs could be positive for increasing British Columbians' ability to engage with their elected representatives.

Regarding public consultations, Members highlighted that public consultation should be meaningful and should effectively adapt to fast-paced technological changes, including those related to social media and artificial intelligence. Committee Members further noted that public consultations should be proactive and inclusive, use diverse methods to reach communities that may not typically be engaged, and engage youth more effectively. Some Members noted that robust consultation methods already exist within government and are carried out by MLAs, including holding townhalls, meeting with constituents individually, and engaging constituents virtually. Members highlighted that helping voters be active and engaged involves efforts to make everyone feel included in public processes, robust non-partisan civic education starting from a young age, and consistent efforts to engage with the public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

1. Establish a non-partisan centre of excellence for democratic engagement, in collaboration with experts, to develop resources that support local engagement, public learning, and consultation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

2. Request that the federal government include letters addressed to Members of the Legislative Assembly in the Canada Post agreement where letters to Members of Parliament are delivered postage-free.
3. Enhance public consultation processes by:
 - a. ensuring proactive and early engagement with the public using diverse consultation methods, transparent and responsive communication, and timely release of results of consultations;
 - b. leveraging technology to create secure, accessible, and inclusive platforms for public input, deliberation, and direct public engagement initiatives;
 - c. empowering youth to help co-design engagement tools and messaging; and
 - d. creating a standing youth advisory body or roles within key provincial ministries, to provide input on legislation, programs, and budgets that affect youth.

INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

The Committee heard input from individuals and organizations on communication and information-sharing, misinformation and disinformation, artificial intelligence (AI), social media, online harms, journalism, transparency, and election results and analysis.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION-SHARING

The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions described research it conducted with the Media Ecosystem Observatory during the 2024 provincial general election, which found increasing fragmentation in the online information environment. The study found that different parties and influencers are using different platforms to get their messages out, and that while mainstream media provides some widely shared information, it did not fully bridge partisan divides. The Media Ecosystem Observatory also found that British Columbians are highly concerned about online misinformation (43 percent), foreign interference in BC politics (41 percent), and AI use in elections (50 percent). The study looked for but did not find significant evidence of foreign interference or foreign information manipulation during the 2024 election.

Dr. Sarah Wiebe from the University of Victoria explained that democratic reform and public engagement strategies require an effective media strategy focused on democratic policy communication, with a role for traditional media along with new forms of social and interactive media. Dr. Wiebe recommended strengthening government communications and creating a standing policy design lab with the University of Victoria for collaboration, problem-solving, and joint reporting. The Committee additionally heard from individuals who emphasized the importance of effective communications and information-sharing by government, as well as individuals who identified a need for people to have better access to MLAs and for MLAs to communicate effectively with their constituents.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Provisions of the *Election Act* enacted in 2023 prohibit false statements against candidates and election officials intended to affect election results or containing false statements about candidates' biographical information. New provisions also prohibit the misrepresentation or impersonation of political candidates, such as through deepfakes, and allow Elections BC to order the takedown of specific election advertising or content that does not meet the provisions of the Act. Certain prohibitions are always in effect, while others only apply at specific times before, during, and after the writ period.

UBC's Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions noted that while changes to the *Election Act* enabled Elections BC to require stopped transmission on types of misinformation, pushing for regulation at the federal level is critical for moving forward. The Centre also suggested Elections BC could increase its capacity to create fact-checking content that is ready to go out on different platforms and be easily shared, as Elections Canada did in the most recent federal election.

The Centre further highlighted the importance of addressing data voids, which are spaces where there is little or no high-quality information available, which make it easier to spread conspiracy theories or problematic content. The Centre recommended that Elections BC and other government organizations focus on providing high-quality information pre-emptively to prevent data voids. The Hua Foundation highlighted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was rampant disinformation in non-English language communities, and recommended conducting more in-person engagements and increasing accessibility, particularly focusing on language accessibility to combat misinformation.

Multiple participants, including the World Sikh Organization of Canada, expressed concern about the connection between disinformation and foreign interference. The Organization stated that during the 2024 election, bot farms spread divisive narratives designed to discourage Sikh Canadians from voting and to question their loyalty to Canada. The

Organization recommended creating a coordinated system to detect, investigate, and mark misinformation campaigns on social media targeting specific communities. To address misinformation and disinformation, the Committee also received recommendations to: increase verification and fact-checking; better regulate social media platforms; create government-supported, public education fact-checking portals; and establish independent oversight for issue-based and political communication.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions in 2024 found that generative AI exacerbated the existing problems of fake news, proliferation of low-quality information, and online harassment but did not create substantially new ones. The Centre noted that AI has also made it easier to create deepfakes, which particularly affects women and raises concerns about harassment and whether that might reduce the number of women willing to run for office.

The Committee also heard from the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association on the threat of AI for democratic processes. The Association stated that the rise of AI may worsen the impact of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information on democratic processes and may threaten election integrity. The Association highlighted that these emerging threats are acting faster than the legislation can be amended, which requires amendments to regulations and the development of a robust system that can address emerging threats. The Association recommended government create a working group to propose amendments to the *Personal Information Protection Act* and the *Election Act*. The Association noted that amendments should include formally regulating the use of generative AI in campaigning and advertising, implementing requirements and procedures for the use of influencers in election advertising, and ensuring advertising and financial transparency that regulates the collection and use of personal data.

The Committee also heard from individuals and organizations on the threat of AI creating deepfakes and spreading misinformation, which participants indicated could undermine electoral integrity, polarize society, and erode democratic institutions. Dr. Maxwell Cameron from the University of British Columbia recommended government explore the

potential threats and opportunities of AI, automation, and technological change for democratic governance.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Several individuals were of the view that social media platforms amplify misinformation and disinformation, including from potential foreign and corporate influences, by using social media bots, distorting public discourse, and promoting extremism. The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions noted that the information environment is in flux as social media platforms continue to evolve and change media habits. The Samara Centre for Democracy stated that major social media platforms have significantly restricted data access programs, undermining work assessing how platform design affects user well-being and democratic health. The Samara Centre stated that civil society organizations must be enabled to investigate these platforms to understand the scope of harm occurring on the platforms. The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association highlighted that the rise of social media has led to new forms of election advertising not only through social media platforms, as Elections BC's guidance explicitly addresses, but also through the use of social media content creators. The Association stated that the role of social media influencers in elections is often overlooked, leading to gaps in election legislation and policy.

ONLINE HARMS

The Samara Centre for Democracy highlighted the impact of online harms on democracy. The Samara Centre stated that first-time candidates are the most vulnerable to abuse, as they have the least support and experience navigating online and offline abuse, and recommended supports for first-time candidates through mentorship and workplace safety protections. The Samara Centre further recommended that to respond to democratic decline exacerbated by online information threats, BC should follow "design code" and "duty of care" style legislation used by governments in the UK, European Union, and Australia. This type of legislation requires online platforms to uphold user safety and consumer protection, ensures government is responsible for identifying non-compliance, and requires online platforms to make amendments to comply or face large fines.

The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions noted that BC's *Intimate Images Protection Act* could serve as a model for responding to other types of online harms, and recommended

government consider further measures during election periods to try to protect candidates and election officials from potential abuse and harassment. The Centre's previous research on the harassment of candidates and journalists suggests that online and in-person abuse undermines people's safety, mental health, and willingness to run for and serve in elected office. The Centre also recommended communicating the province's regulatory needs clearly and regularly to the federal government.

JOURNALISM

The Committee heard from multiple individuals who expressed concern about a decline in news media. UBC's Dr. Stewart Prest highlighted that local journalism is essential for voters to be informed. Dr. Prest recommended exploring targeted ways to support local news outlets to increase public awareness, such as funds distributed by an independent committee made up of journalists and community members who would report to the Legislature to ensure transparency and accountability.

One individual stated that BC would benefit from a more community-oriented media system with less corporate ownership. Another individual discussed the possibility of asking British Columbians if they want to fund independent media, and recommended investing in the free press.

TRANSPARENCY AND RESEARCH

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue spoke to the Committee about the Open Government Partnership, which provides a global hub for governments to advance their commitments to accountability, transparency, and civic participation. The Centre recommended BC join Quebec and the Government of Canada as members and build on existing assets such as the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to advance work on accountability, transparency, and civic participation.

The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions stated that any resilient electoral system relies on the capacity of civil society to understand the information system and to evaluate new policies, such as the voluntary BC political campaign activity code of practice. The Centre recommended providing more stable and specific funding for research to monitor provincial elections and analyze long-term trends, rather than sporadic and non-consecutive election research.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

The Committee heard from several organizations concerned about foreign interference. The BC Federation of Labour suggested government implement a strategy to actively address disinformation and foreign interference and build resilience in BC's democratic infrastructure. North Shore Community Resources highlighted the need to ensure that provincial legislation, policies, funding, and democratic institutions can respond to increasing threats. The Committee also received recommendations for stricter laws and stronger defenses against foreign and electoral interference.

The World Sikh Organization expressed concerns that BC MLAs and candidates are engaging with the Indian consulate outside of constituency related matters. To monitor and respond to foreign interference, the Organization recommended enhancing coordination between Elections BC, intelligence agencies, and social media platforms and strengthening transparency and oversight of candidate nomination processes.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee discussed the importance of protecting freedom of expression, enabling debate, and exchanging different perspectives, while also countering misinformation and disinformation and upholding election integrity. Members noted that it is necessary to have legal mechanisms to quickly and effectively counter harmful content spread during elections. Committee Members highlighted the personal negative impact of being the subject of misinformation and disinformation campaigns during elections, especially campaigns targeting candidates' identities. Members emphasized the need to target misinformation and disinformation in languages other than English and to address AI deepfakes and other disinformation on social media, and for holding social media platforms accountable. The Committee noted the necessity of working with the federal government and Elections BC to address concerns related to misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

On AI and social media, the Committee highlighted that experts in the field need to examine the issues to equip government with the knowledge to implement necessary safeguards around the use of AI in democratic and electoral practices. Members supported the idea of establishing a working group that could propose related amendments to the *Personal Information Protection Act* and the *Election Act*.

Members noted that having access to mental health support when being targeted by online harassment would be beneficial, especially for those running for public office. Members also agreed that candidates' family members should not be subject to harassment. Members discussed possible changes to legislation, such as implementing duty of care legislation for online platforms, that could protect those running for public office from online abuse, harassment, and harm. Committee Members highlighted that sometimes individuals are targeted in-person based on information shared about them online.

The Committee discussed government transparency, highlighting its importance while also noting that some limits on transparency are necessary to protect confidential information. Members further discussed the possible merits of BC joining the Open Government Partnership.

Regarding foreign interference, Members recognized that foreign interference in elections is a longstanding concern, while highlighting recent issues like bots on social media discouraging participation in specific communities. The Committee agreed there is a need for proactive, ongoing collaboration in the time between elections so that Elections BC is prepared to mitigate foreign interference efforts. The Committee reflected on the work of the Electoral Integrity Working Group, a group of cybersecurity, law enforcement, intelligence, privacy, and election agencies formed by Elections BC in 2023 to collaborate on election integrity. The Committee recognized the Working Group's efforts to date on foreign interference but noted that it remains a pressing concern. Members agreed that it would be beneficial for the Working Group to review the submissions the Committee received regarding foreign interference.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

4. In collaboration with Elections BC and the federal government, review current legislative and regulatory measures to counter misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech during elections, including:
 - a. strengthening rules and enforcement;
 - b. examining mechanisms for more timely removal of harmful content; and
 - c. strengthening the regulation of social media platforms while maintaining freedom of expression.
5. Establish a working group to propose amendments to the *Personal Information Protection Act* and *Election Act* to better address social media and emergent technologies, including artificial intelligence.
6. Strengthen protections and support for candidates and their family members experiencing harassment, abuse, and other forms of online harms.
7. Require digital platforms to:
 - a. act with a duty of care, establishing clear requirements to protect users and ensure their safety, including through data privacy, platform design, and content policy; and
 - b. provide information and evidence to an independent external auditor to determine the effectiveness of safety measures and identify new risks and mitigation strategies.
8. Join the Open Government Partnership.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

9. Ensure the Electoral Integrity Working Group identifies and addresses the concerns about foreign interference in all of its forms raised in the Committee's consultation.

CIVIC EDUCATION

According to the Ministry of Education and Child Care, BC's Social Studies K-10 curriculum includes learning standards about democratic education, where students learn about their roles, rights, and responsibilities within a democratic society. There are also civic and political education elective course options in grades 11 and 12. The Ministry sets high level policies for the education system, including curriculum, while boards of education oversee educational program delivery. Staff in schools and school districts are responsible for the review, approval, and selection of learning resources, including resources related to civic education.

Throughout the Committee's consultation, participants underscored the critical importance of public understanding of democratic institutions, processes, and participation. A focus that emerged was strengthening BC's civic education system, with attention to updating resources and ensuring consistent implementation. Additionally, participants identified the importance of improving students' critical thinking and media literacy skills. The Committee also heard about the value of providing applied civic education opportunities, as well as professional development for educators. Regarding education outside of the school system, participants shared insights about supporting public civic education through various initiatives.

STRENGTHENING K-12 CIVIC EDUCATION

Approximately 20 participants, including CityHive Youth Engagement Society, identified a need to improve BC's civic education, including enhancing curriculum and delivery. CIVIX shared that in a 2024 survey conducted by the organization, 75 percent of Canadian teachers reported they felt they did not have time to teach civics and that they faced too much pressure to focus on other subjects. Member of Parliament for Saanich-Gulf Islands and Leader of the Green Party of Canada Elizabeth May highlighted how the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform heard that time spent teaching about democracy is declining; she recommended

more meaningful and engaged K-12 education about how democracy in Canada works.

Beyond time spent teaching the subject, the Committee heard from participants concerned about the quality and quantity of civic education in BC. One individual recommended adding more civic education into the school curriculum in each grade level. CityHive Youth Engagement Society indicated that civic education is uneven across the province and inconsistently implemented. To minimize variation between teachers, the South Island Climate Action Network recommended creating strong guidelines for civic education curriculum. Additionally, participants including CIVIX recommended funding non-partisan civic education resources.

Dr. Paula Waatainen from Vancouver Island University stated that basic democratic education and systems of government in the BC curriculum are included in grades 1, 2, 5, 6, and 10, but are often delivered in a way that is unmemorable. Dr. Waatainen supported updating BC's learning standards for democratic education. Vote16 BC stated that over 60 percent of BC youth aged 18 to 29 do not remember being taught how government works or how to engage in their communities.

The Committee also heard from several participants who supported increasing civic education specifically about electoral systems, voting processes, and democratic institutions. The BC Federation of Labour recommended using curriculum to prepare high school students for their first time voting. Dr. Maxwell Cameron from the University of British Columbia recommended strengthening civic education in schools to foster the habits and competencies of active citizenship. The Samara Centre for Democracy recommended developing robust, age-appropriate content that equips students with the knowledge and skills for democratic engagement. Additionally, CityHive Youth Engagement Society recommended emphasizing in the curriculum real-world skills, such as how to engage with elected officials, understand legislation, participate in public consultations, and organize collectively. The Young BC Greens also recommended

focusing on electoral systems, voting processes, and political institutions to inform future voters.

MISINFORMATION AND CRITICAL THINKING

The Committee heard from multiple participants concerned about misinformation and advocating for increased critical thinking and media literacy courses in BC schools. The South Island Climate Action Network noted that critical thinking and misinformation is a part of the BC curriculum; however, it is impacted by limited resources. Clayoquot Biosphere Trust emphasized that BC school curriculum should teach more about critical thinking, including the ability to detect and counter misinformation. One participant recommended strengthening civic education with real-life examples that encourage young people to think critically, ask questions, and challenge what they are told. Dr. Waatainen recommended reviewing BC's K-12 curriculum to include up to date research and teaching methods on civic and online literacy. Additionally, multiple participants pointed to Finland's success with teaching children about this subject and recommended applying Finland's model of teaching students to detect and counter misinformation in BC schools.

APPLIED CIVIC EDUCATION

A recurring theme shared by participants was the importance of opportunities for applied learning. CityHive Youth Engagement Society stated that BC's civic education often lacks emphasis on practical, participatory skills. According to CIVIX, a review in Australia found that civic education curriculum was ineffective due to a focus on rote-style teaching. Instead, the organization suggested that students should be provided with authentic opportunities to engage critically in civic issues.

Multiple participants highlighted CIVIX's Student Vote program as a successful example of applied civic education for students, promoting understanding and future participation. Many schools participate in Student Vote activities, developed by CIVIX in partnership with Elections Canada and Elections BC. Student Vote programming runs parallel to most provincial elections and every federal election. In the last school year, BC students participated in the program for the provincial and federal elections, casting more than 180,000 and 155,000 votes respectively. One participant highlighted that positive impacts extend beyond students with 90 percent of parents reporting that the program gave their family an opportunity to

learn more about politics. According to Vote16 BC, 96 percent of teachers said that Student Vote made them more confident in teaching government and civics.

In addition to increasing Student Vote programming in schools, the Committee received recommendations for creating a youth democracy program with school recognition for participation, including opportunities like volunteering at polling stations and shadowing elected officials, as well as increasing opportunities for model parliaments, mock debates, and student councils.

TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS

The Committee also heard that educators could benefit from increased training opportunities and funding for civic education. CIVIX stated that teaching meaningful civic education requires adequate time, training, resourcing, and institutional support. Further, CityHive Youth Engagement Society noted that less than half of Canadian educators feel confident teaching civics.

CIVIX stated that only 25 percent of educators reported that they received any formal education in civics during their pre-service training. Accordingly, CIVIX recommended funding consistent pre-service and in-service civics professional development for educators. To provide resources and training for educators, the organization advocated for increased formal collaboration between government ministries, agencies, and democratic engagement organizations to bring resources and training to educators.

POST-SECONDARY

Beyond K-12 education, the Committee received input about civic education in post-secondary institutions. The Democratic Engagement Exchange indicated that post-secondary institutions are critical junctures where most voters cast their first ballot, providing a unique opportunity to significantly boost student engagement.

Dr. Sarah Wiebe from the University of Victoria recommended that educators and legislators work together to help the public understand how systems function and can improve. Additionally, the Simon Fraser University Centre for Restorative Justice recommended funding universities and civil society organizations to train educators about methods that promote active citizenship in young people.

CIVIC EDUCATION OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Committee heard from multiple individuals who identified a need for increased civic education outside of the K-12 or post-secondary education systems. Others emphasized how civic education can support British Columbians to participate in democracy.

According to Dr. Wiebe, civic education can include a range of activities such as participating in electoral simulations, exercises on evidence-based decision-making to counter misinformation, and activities that encourage meaningful discussions. Dr. Wiebe recommended implementing broader voter and civic education to improve civic competencies. Multiple participants noted the importance of non-partisan civic education, with the BC Green Party recommending assigning Elections BC formal responsibility for leading non-partisan education initiatives about the rights and responsibilities of civic participation. The BC Federation of Students and other participants noted the importance of supporting media and digital literacy education. Multiple individuals stated that knowledge and opportunities to participate in democratic processes help reduce the impact of misinformation. Agenda Gap Youth recommended that BC increase access to accurate, non-partisan political information.

Some participants recommended increasing civic education overall and others focused on increasing funding for civic education initiatives. Multiple participants recommended expanding civic education programs that help people understand their rights, the functions of democratic institutions, and avenues for participation. The Civic Engagement Network Society of Canada recommended increasing education and community engagement regarding the political process.

Participants also emphasized the importance of civic education for voters of all backgrounds, including underserved communities. For example, one individual recommended investing in community-based civic education for newcomers and marginalized communities. Multiple participants recommended partnering with local institutions and groups to host free civic education programming, including with schools, libraries, and community organizations. CityHive Youth Engagement Society recommended increasing access to multilingual and culturally relevant civic education materials, to ensure all communities can engage in democratic processes between elections. The World Sikh Organization of Canada

advocated for funding and resources for civic education programs such as its Kaur's Vote initiative, which promotes electoral engagement for Sikh and Punjabi women. CityHive Youth Engagement Society advocated for increasing funding to community-based, non-partisan organizations offering civic education and democratic literacy programs particularly for rural, Indigenous, and racialized youth.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee reflected on the deep value of effective civic education for BC's democracy. Members emphasized the foundational importance of delivering informative civic education in a manner that does not advance the specific political perspective of an individual educator. The Committee also recognized input regarding uneven civic education across BC and underscored the importance of consistent civic education approaches for all BC students.

Committee Members recognized the important work that BC teachers are undertaking to deliver civic education for BC students. The importance of applied learning opportunities was recognized by Committee Members, while noting that application depends on implementation from individual teachers and school districts. Members also recognized the success of Student Vote programming which engaged thousands of BC students in the last provincial election. The Committee agreed that K-12 civic education could be strengthened, with input from resource development experts and with emphasis on applied learning opportunities.

The Committee noted the opportunity to provide teachers with more high-quality civic education resources, while affirming the value of educator autonomy regarding resources used. Additionally, the Committee noted the importance of pre- and in-service professional development opportunities for educators regarding civic education. While noting the importance of strengthening BC's civic education curriculum, the Committee acknowledged inherent challenges related to balancing other curriculum areas. Members also highlighted potential opportunities for creating dual-credit high school courses that include civic education, to support students' future post-secondary pursuits while further promoting civic understanding.

The Committee also recognized the vital importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills due to the current digital environment and implications for democracy. Members noted the success of media literacy education in Finland, while

acknowledging that best practices from any jurisdictions would need to be adapted to the BC context. Committee Members indicated that BC should review, adapt, and incorporate best practices regarding instruction on these topics into BC schools.

Beyond the K-12 school system, the Committee identified the importance of non-partisan civic education for the broader public, ensuring that citizens have the tools required to fully participate in democracy and elections. Members also noted the value of delivering this education and related materials in a variety of languages. The Committee recognized community organizations that are undertaking this vital work across BC. Members identified the opportunity for Elections BC to have formal responsibility for leading non-partisan education initiatives, including about the rights and responsibilities of civic participation, and to provide dedicated funding and resources for community civic engagement programs delivered in multiple languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

10. Strengthen civic education in the K-12 school system, with input from resource development experts and an emphasis on applied learning.
11. Review, adapt, and incorporate best practices regarding media literacy, critical thinking, and misinformation education in BC schools.
12. Prioritize funding for pre-service and in-service civic education professional development for K-12 educators and support similar opportunities for post-secondary instructors.

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

13. Assign Elections BC formal responsibility for:
 - a. leading non-partisan education initiatives, including about the rights and responsibilities of civic participation; and
 - b. administering grants dedicated to non-partisan community civic engagement programs, delivered in multiple languages where numbers warrant.

VOTING

During the Committee's consultation, participants affirmed the foundational importance of voting and voter participation. A central focus was improving voter participation through various methods such as strengthening registration processes and enhancing public awareness practices. Participants underscored the importance of lowering barriers to participation broadly and for specific communities, noting opportunities to improve voting methods available, expand voting periods, and update practices related to voting locations and staffing. The Committee also heard about barriers faced by younger voters and suggestions aimed at improving youth participation, as well as potentially expanding voting eligibility.

VOTING ELIGIBILITY

In BC, Canadian citizens aged 18 or older can vote in provincial elections if they have been a BC resident for at least six months. The voting age in BC has been 18 since 1992, when it was lowered from 19.

The Committee received suggestions for expanding voter eligibility with supporters stating that expanding voter eligibility would strengthen democracy and remove barriers to engagement. Approximately 15 participants, including Dogwood, recommended allowing permanent residents to vote. Supporters suggested that permanent residents deserve voting rights as they live, work, pay taxes, and raise children in BC. The BC Civil Liberties Association emphasized that permanent residents are governed by BC's laws, contribute economically and socially to communities, and deserve a voice in shaping the province's future.

The Committee also heard from multiple individuals who opposed expanding voting eligibility and who advocated for further restrictions. Multiple individuals recommended sustaining current citizenship requirements for voting, while other suggestions included introducing a maximum voting age. One individual stated that expanding eligibility could undermine public trust and increase foreign interference risks.

VOTING AGE

The Committee heard from approximately 100 participants that BC's voting age should be lowered with approximately 90 of those participants specifying that the voting age should be lowered to 16.

Participants indicated that lowering the voting age would encourage voter participation and engagement. Vote16 Canada and Agenda Gap Youth stated that youth deserve the right to vote as future generations are the most impacted by the decisions made today. The Starfish Canada stated that the voting age should be lowered to recognize youth passion, engagement, and desire to elect representatives who will address issues faced by this demographic. One individual stated that youth voter participation could produce a trickle-up effect, for example by encouraging family members to vote. Another individual was of the view that lowering the voting age to 16 would make BC's democracy a more inclusive and representative democratic system.

Approximately 20 participants, including the European Youth Forum, indicated that a lower voting age would increase lifelong voting habits. CUPE BC stated that the most significant predictor of regular lifetime voting for individuals is participation in the first election in which they are eligible to vote. Vote16 Canada referenced research showing increased lifetime voting habits for people who vote for the first time at 16. The Committee heard that supportive home and school environments increase the likelihood that 16- and 17-year-olds will vote in their first eligible election. CityHive Youth Engagement Society stated that 18-year-olds gain the ability to vote during the transition to adulthood and the loss of high school support systems. CUPE BC noted that by delaying voting until age 18, BC loses a crucial window of engagement as people have left high school and gained new obligations.

Approximately 30 participants also indicated that lowering the voting age would align with the other responsibilities that teenagers have. The BC Civil Liberties Association and Vote16 BC noted that 16-year-olds in BC are already entrusted

with many legal and social responsibilities including working, paying taxes, driving, and marriage. The Committee also heard that youth possess the cognitive development and maturity required for voting, according to academic research. The Samara Centre for Democracy stated that neuroscientific and social science research demonstrates that 16-year-olds match adults in the quality of their vote choice.

A number of participants referenced jurisdictions that allow 16-years-olds to vote in elections at various levels of government, including Austria, Germany, and Scotland, as well as the United Kingdom government's intention to lower the voting age to 16 for national elections. Several individuals noted that countries with a lower voting age have experienced positive effects, such as increased young voter turnout. The Young BC Greens and the Samara Centre for Democracy also stated that several BC municipalities, organizations, and school boards support lowering the voting age. Multiple individuals recommended pairing a lower voting age with enhanced civic education, preparing students for future voting while in high school.

Several participants, including the BC Green Party, CityHive Youth Engagement Society, and Generation Squeeze, suggested lowering the voting age in both municipal and provincial elections. The BC Green Party stated that lowering the voting age could begin with municipal elections in 2026, providing the opportunity to understand voter turnout within the 16- to 18-year-old demographic. Vote16 BC also suggested that a lower age could be implemented at the municipal and school trustee level first, if needed. As an incentive for implementation, the organization also explained that lowering the voting age could be tried for one election and re-evaluated.

The Committee also heard from several individuals who opposed lowering the voting age. Participants suggested that youth are not mature or responsible enough to vote. One individual noted that 16-year-olds experience other age-based restrictions, including on the ability to buy alcohol or join the military. Another stated teenagers' brains and decision-making capacities are not fully developed and that they are not up to the task of protecting democracy. The Leadership and Democracy Lab noted that some people may be concerned about parental and teacher influences regarding how to vote.

VOTER PARTICIPATION

Another key theme in the Committee's consultation was concern regarding low voter turnout in BC elections and how this may undermine the legitimacy of the democratic system and create a disconnect between the electorate and the institutions that represent them. Over the last 30 years, there has been a slight decline in voter turnout in BC, a trend which matches other jurisdictions in Canada, as well as most Western democracies. Voter turnout in BC hovered around 70 percent in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, but it has since fallen to around 60 percent. Voter turnout in BC is measured as a percentage of registered voters, not as a percentage of eligible voters. According to Elections BC, this is primarily because election management bodies know the exact number of registered voters but can only estimate the number of eligible voters using census data.

Regarding voter turnout, Elections BC has focused on providing voters with information, reducing administrative barriers to voting, and ensuring that polling stations meet voters' needs. During election campaigns, Elections BC supports candidates and political parties in their efforts to increase voter participation by sharing participation data. This data helps campaigns identify voters who have yet to vote, so they can be contacted and encouraged to participate.

According to Elections BC's post-election survey in 2024, 44 percent of non-voters did not participate due to reasons related to everyday life (e.g., lack of time, travel, and forgetting). Another 38 percent did not vote for political reasons, such as not liking candidates, lack of party representation, and feelings that their vote would not make a difference. Six percent cited electoral process reasons, such as not knowing where to vote, as reasons for not participating.

Throughout the consultation, the Committee heard various recommendations aimed at improving participation. The BC NDP and BC Green Party recommended assigning Elections BC formal responsibility for increasing voter turnout. Additionally, the BC NDP recommended amending the *Election Act* to ensure that registered parties and candidates can access poll-by-poll results and information about when and where voters cast their ballot, highlighting legislative changes that ended the collection of this data. It also recommended conducting a review of communities with lower-than-average participation rates to identify potential systemic problems and increase participation. Another participant suggested reviewing poll-by-poll voter turnout to identify underserved

polls and direct increased service levels in following elections. The Democratic Engagement Exchange recommended that BC collect and publish disaggregated data on voter turnout. The organization explained that this would enable Elections BC to more effectively target outreach and engagement efforts as well as identify participation gaps, track progress, and ensure equitable engagement across all demographics.

Several participants identified election participation barriers faced by some individuals and groups, particularly regarding identification requirements. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition highlighted challenges faced by unhoused or precariously housed individuals, and recommended consulting with front-line service providers to better understand limitations as providers can provide proof of identification for voters. According to reThink Community Education, transgender individuals may also face barriers due to identification requirements. The organization recommended implementing clear guidelines and training that prioritize voters' right to vote, even when there are discrepancies between appearance and identification, provided the individual can otherwise reasonably affirm their identity.

VOTER REGISTRATION

British Columbians can register to vote in-person at Election BC's office in Victoria, or by mail, phone, email, or online. Additionally, eligible 16- and 17-year-olds can be added to a list of future voters from which they are automatically transferred to the voters list at age 18. The *Election Act* does not require the Chief Electoral Officer to conduct enumerations, which are province-wide voter registration drives. They may be conducted through door-to-door visits or by another method directed or authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Committee heard that voter registration can be a barrier to participation. Approximately 14 individuals supported expanding and improving voter registration programs and initiatives, including simplifying or making registration automatic. One individual recommended registering youth to vote in high school. Another recommended better highlighting in Elections BC advertising the ability to register on election day.

A number of organizations and individuals highlighted a need for more proactive enumeration practices, especially in areas of high density, new neighbourhoods, or areas with high turnover. The BC NDP stated that Elections BC currently

relies on passive voter enumeration, largely counting on British Columbians to register themselves to vote. CUPE BC emphasized that accurate and complete voter lists require door-to-door outreach. Several participants recommended mandating proactive enumeration, with some specifying this should occur on an annual basis. The Committee also received recommendations related to conducting enumerations in First Nations communities in consultation with local leadership.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Elections BC provides voters with information related to voting, including how to register, voter eligibility, identification requirements, and the availability of different voting opportunities. To promote awareness of the 2024 provincial election, Elections BC conducted a province-wide public education campaign and sent voter guides to every residential address in BC and to organizations, such as 13,000 public libraries. Elections BC also conducted voter enumeration from August to September 2024 and held registration drives in every electoral district. Additionally, staff visited locations where voters are less likely to be registered, such as facilities for people experiencing homelessness. Elections BC communicates with all First Nations communities directly and provides information regarding voter registration and voting opportunities. Elections BC also provides the option to hire a community liaison officer from within the community, to be a focal point for information. Respondents to Elections BC's survey of voters in the 2024 provincial general election stated it was moderately easy or very easy to find information regarding where to vote (94 percent), when to vote (96 percent), and different ways to vote (93 percent).

Multiple participants recommended investing in voter outreach and enhancing current efforts undertaken by Elections BC, including expanding languages used and communities served. Some noted that certain populations face increased barriers to accessing voter information cards due to disability, location, and lack of frequent postal service. One individual identified a gap between voter engagement and outreach in Indigenous communities. The Democratic Engagement Exchange recommended establishing a Community Engagement Officer program at Elections BC which would allow Elections BC to do year-round and proactive outreach. The organization was of the view that this could help build trust and create space for people to see themselves as valuable participants in democratic processes. Another participant recommended focusing education efforts and materials on plain language

and cultural relevancy. CUPE BC recommended Elections BC enhance public education regarding accessible voting options, particularly before elections.

Other participants identified opportunities to promote election awareness by engaging with different organizations. The BC Federation of Labour recommended increasing outreach to service organizations who work with low income, unhoused, and otherwise marginalized populations. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition stated that front-line service providers should be leveraged to communicate election information before and during voting periods, including at shelters and food banks. The organization also recommended that Elections BC provide ongoing outreach and education with unhoused or precariously housed communities outside of election periods. One individual suggested that Elections BC coordinate with Crown corporations and public institutions, including BC Ferries, BC Liquor Stores, and public schools, to promote election awareness.

VOTING METHODS AND PERIODS

There are many opportunities to vote in BC including voting at district electoral offices, advance voting, voting by mail, and in person on final voting day. Elections BC's vote anywhere model allows citizens to vote at any voting opportunity throughout the province, instead of limiting voting to an individual's district. Certain individuals can participate through assisted telephone voting, if they meet eligibility criteria such as sight loss. Elections BC also offers mobile and special voting opportunities to individuals who cannot reasonably travel to a voting place, such as those in hospitals.

The percentage of votes cast in advance is consistently increasing, with 47.5 percent of votes cast in advance in 2024 versus 5.7 percent in 1996. For the first time, advance voting surpassed final voting in 2024 as a percentage of overall turnout. Between 1996 and 2017, votes cast by mail accounted for about one percent of ballots cast. In 2020, voting by mail spiked to 31.4 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Elections BC, it has since declined to 3.7 percent in the most recent election.

Multiple individuals and organizations supported increasing awareness of and access to different voting opportunities. CUPE BC explained that many people are unaware of how accessible voting options work, despite the importance of these options for some seniors, people with disabilities, and those living in remote areas. The organization recommended

promoting and investing in accessible voting options like mail-in and telephone voting. The BC Federation of Labour recommended increasing the promotion and support of mail-in and telephone voting, plus out-of-jurisdiction voting. One participant recommended increasing accessibility by making the size of ballots larger and restructuring them to be more easily read.

The Committee heard from multiple individuals that online voting should be introduced. Supporters stated that secure online voting would enable greater voting ease and overall participation. Multiple individuals stated that this would improve voting accessibility, particularly for rural, young, and busy voters. Recommendations included exploring secure online voting options, creating pilot programs, and implementing a legislative framework for online voting.

The Committee also heard from organizations and individuals about the merits of increasing the writ or voting periods. The BC Federation of Labour stated that increasing the number of voting days would increase voter participation. CUPE BC and an individual recommended increasing the voting period to two weeks, with CUPE additionally recommending increasing the writ period from the current 28 days to 35 days. One individual suggested improving access by increasing voting hours.

VOTING PLACES

The *Election Act* requires that voting places are easily accessible to voters who have disabilities or mobility challenges, and Elections BC aims to ensure that voting places meet accessibility criteria. Elections BC works with liaisons and with each community to establish voting places that are accessible to members of those communities. The organization hires District Electoral Officers from within the community and uses local knowledge to identify voting locations. Elections BC posts a list of voting locations three months before voting day to receive input on the number and accessibility of locations and make any necessary changes.

Multiple participants identified issues regarding voting locations. The BC NDP stated that there is no requirement to consult with the local community, which can lead to significant inconsistencies between electoral districts regarding the number of voting locations available. It recommended amending the *Election Act* to require consultation with communities with low participation rates, including Indigenous communities and post-secondary communities, prior to

establishing voting opportunities. Others advocated for including minimum standards for voting opportunities in the *Election Act*. The Committee also heard that First Nations are more likely to have voting opportunities reduced or cancelled, and received recommendations for Elections BC to develop standards for the selection and scheduling of voting locations in Indigenous communities to ensure equitable, culturally-appropriate voting opportunities. Some participants shared concerns about using religious institutions as polling locations, which they stated might deter some voters. The BC Federation of Labour recommended expanding advance voting locations, with attention to racial and geographic inequities.

The Committee heard about a need to improve accessibility, including support travelling to voting locations, signage accessibility, and expanded language services like ASL interpretation. Multiple individuals recommended ensuring that polling stations are accessible to people with disabilities. One participant recommended increasing supports available for seniors and people with disabilities. The Kootenay-Monashee BC NDP Electoral District Association recommended that Elections BC increase support for people requiring assistance to vote and for people who need assistance getting to polling stations. The World Sikh Organization of Canada recommended improving signage, including by providing signs in multiple languages and implementing signage that condemns racial profiling. New Majority identified challenges related to construction near polling locations and recommended developing guidelines for related signage around polling stations to improve accessibility.

YOUTH VOTING

According to CityHive Youth Engagement Society, young people are eager to participate but face practical and informational barriers to voting. The organization stated that barriers must be reduced to increase youth voter participation through measures such as improving access to information about where and when youth can vote. reThink Community Education noted that Statistics Canada has identified that 'electoral process issues' disproportionately affect voters aged 18 to 24, contributing to significantly lower turnout in this age group compared to the general population. To enhance youth voter engagement, the organization recommended simplifying registration procedures, expanding voting options such as advance and mail-in voting, and disseminating election information through platforms that are accessible and relevant to youth.

The BC Federation of Students stated that registration requirements for voting and issues with receiving voter information cards are a barrier for youth, and that these barriers need to be addressed. The Democratic Engagement Exchange recommended requiring every post-secondary institution to develop a voter engagement plan that designates a staff lead on every campus, and integrating voter registration and civic reflection into student orientation. The organization also advocated for funding student-led, non-partisan engagement initiatives.

The BC Federation of Students also proposed increasing funding to Elections BC to conduct voter engagement work between elections to benefit youth, students, and first-time voters of all ages.

Further, the organization recommended providing more funding for Elections BC to produce robust research on voting behaviour in BC to help identify barriers to voting for youth and other historically disenfranchised populations.

Organizations such as the BC Federation of Students and New Majority noted the importance of on-campus voting stations, with the Democratic Engagement Exchange explaining that on-campus voting opportunities are crucial for first-time voters. Related recommendations focused on ensuring there are voting stations at each post-secondary institution as a permanent feature of BC's elections. The BC Federation of Students also asserted that election periods should take place when most students are on campus, and recommended increasing collaboration between the organization, Elections BC, and Elections Canada to increase accessibility of voting for youth.

STAFFING LEVELS AND TRAINING

Elections BC hires and trains local community members to administer voting opportunities during elections. For the 2024 election, Elections BC hired 17,000 election officials provincewide. For future elections, Elections BC intends to improve and enhance training and tools provided to focus on results reporting and the quality assurance processes.

The Committee heard that wait times can be a barrier to participation. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition noted that wait times disproportionately affect low-income people, single parents, seniors, and people with disabilities. One individual recommended implementing mandatory minimum staffing levels for Elections BC and local elections bodies, to ensure

voters can cast ballots quickly and with confidence. To reduce wait times, the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition recommended ensuring appropriate resourcing during election periods and the BC Federation of Labour recommended that Elections BC prioritize staffing.

Multiple participants advocated for Elections BC staff to receive inclusivity training, with the World Sikh Organization of Canada recommending cultural sensitivity training. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition advocated for training about Indigenous rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and anti-stigmatization. The BC Federation of Labour and reThink Community Education advocated for increased training regarding identity verification requirements, noting challenges experienced by precariously housed, unhoused, and transgender voters. reThink Community Education also recommended enhanced staff training regarding gender identity, pronouns, and respectful communication.

MANDATORY VOTING AND OTHER INCENTIVES

Approximately 21 individuals and organizations supported implementing mandatory voting. According to Research Co., a public opinion research organization, 61 percent of British Columbians support mandatory voting in provincial elections, with 10 percent supporting fines for non-participation and 38 percent supporting rewards such as tax incentives for voting.

Supporters explained that mandatory voting would increase participation and engagement. Multiple individuals noted that several countries have compulsory voting requirements, such as Australia and Switzerland. One individual stated that mandatory voting would enhance equity as it would disincentivize discrimination against some groups of voters.

The Committee also heard from multiple individuals opposed to mandatory voting. Some participants voiced concerns regarding mandating uninformed or uninterested people to participate. Another individual explained that mandatory voting requirements do not address why some people do not vote, such as feeling unrepresented by the available candidates.

In addition to mandatory voting, the Committee received recommendations for providing tax credits or other incentives with the aim of increasing voter participation. Several participants also recommended creating a public holiday on

election day to support voter turnout. Research Co. also found that 54 percent of British Columbians support declaring any provincial election day as a public holiday.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee recognized the importance of voting as a foundational right, but also an important civic responsibility. Members highlighted changes that have been made to make BC's elections and voting processes more accessible, while also identifying opportunities for improvement.

With respect to voter participation, Committee Members reflected on voter registration and participation trends, both in BC and globally. While acknowledging the work undertaken by Elections BC to improve access to voting, Members identified an opportunity to assign Elections BC responsibility for increasing voter participation. The Committee also agreed that ensuring parties and candidates can access poll-by-poll data would support voter participation by providing more detailed information about participation trends.

The Committee heard about challenges related to voter registration and negative implications for voter participation. Members identified the opportunity for Elections BC to improve registration practices, process, and communications, with a focus on increasing youth registration. Additionally, the Committee supported Elections BC exploring the potential implementation of automatic voter registration, but underscored the importance of investigating mechanisms for potential implementation, opt-out provisions, and public consultation. The Committee also emphasized the importance of regular, proactive, in-person enumeration by Elections BC to ensure that the voters list is accurate. Members noted that this is particularly important in areas with high growth or turnover, as well as in First Nations communities. They agreed that the *Election Act* should be updated to require proactive enumeration on an annual basis.

Members discussed barriers related to voting locations and emphasized that some of these challenges are more acute in rural and remote communities. Further, the Committee affirmed the importance of polling stations that are accessible and welcoming to community members. While noting areas for improvement, the Committee recognized the overall accessibility of recent elections. Members agreed that Elections BC should review and improve access to and public awareness of voting opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of any related changes to ensure desired outcomes are met. With

respect to recommendations overall, Members underscored the importance of ongoing reporting and evaluation to ensure that any changes lead to meaningful improvements.

The Committee also reflected on youth participation trends, noting the importance of youth engagement. Members discussed the merits of every post-secondary school developing a voter engagement plan, as many first-time voters are enrolled in these institutions during elections. Committee Members also noted the opportunity to promote voter registration and participation in post-secondary orientation programming, while recognizing potential capacity limitations.

The Committee also considered input regarding online voting. While acknowledging the increased accessibility offered by online voting, Members expressed concerns regarding security, public trust, and challenges experienced in other jurisdictions. Reflecting on the risks associated with online voting and the strengths of BC's paper ballot system, the Committee agreed that online voting should not be implemented at this time. Additionally, Members discussed other methods to increase voter participation, such as mandatory voting as is used in jurisdictions like Australia. Overall, Members recognized the potential merits of mandatory voting as well as challenges such as the impact on people who do not vote for religious reasons. The Committee decided that further pursuit is not warranted at this time.

With respect to expanding voter eligibility, the Committee considered the possibility of allowing permanent residents to vote. Members recognized that permanent residents are

governed by BC's laws and contribute to the province's communities and economy. Some Members emphasized that citizenship should remain a requirement for voting, while others noted that permanent residents may face barriers to becoming citizens. Members also noted that permanent residents do not have the right to vote anywhere else in Canada. Considering the complexity of extending voting rights to permanent residents, Members agreed that further examination of the implications is required.

The Committee also considered lowering BC's voting age and emphasized the consequential nature of voting. While acknowledging the responsibilities that young people are entrusted with, the Committee noted limitations such as tests required for driving. Additionally, Members agreed that BC's civic education system would need to be enhanced if the voting age were lowered. Overall, Members agreed that Elections BC should prepare a public report to understand the implications of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in BC, including the benefits and drawbacks, short- and long-term consequences, and who is impacted. They noted that the report should review national and subnational jurisdictions where this occurs, examine existing best practices, how challenges have been addressed, and implementation considerations including impacts to civic education. Additionally, Committee Members noted that consideration should include the range of rights and responsibilities that young people have access to at different ages and in different contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

14. Assign Elections BC formal responsibility for increasing voter turnout.
15. Amend the *Election Act* to require proactive enumeration on an annual basis, with additional efforts specific to new housing projects, neighbourhoods with higher turnover, and First Nations communities in consultation with local leadership, and ensure Elections BC begins this work by a set deadline and reports publicly on its implementation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

16. Ensure that registered parties and candidates can access poll-by-poll results and information about when and where voters cast their ballot.
17. Prepare a public report identifying and evaluating the implications of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, by reviewing national and sub-national jurisdictions where this occurs.

18. Identify and implement improvements to the practices, process, and communications related to voter registration including exploring:
 - a. opportunities to further encourage youth registration; and
 - b. the potential implementation of implementing automatic voter registration with an opt-out provision.
19. Review and improve access to and public awareness of voting opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of any changes after the next provincial general election.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

20. Examine the implications of extending voting rights to permanent residents in BC.
21. Require every post-secondary institution to work with Elections BC to develop a voter engagement plan that could include a staff lead on every campus and that integrates voter registration and civic engagement into student orientation.

CAMPAIGNING AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

One theme that emerged from the Committee's consultation was improving various aspects of campaigning, both from the voter and candidate perspective, as well as strengthening rules and enforcement of campaign finance regulations. Participants shared opportunities to modernize candidate nomination processes, improve the information that voters have about candidates and parties, increase political parties' access to voters, and make it easier for people to run for elected office. With respect to campaign finance, the Committee heard about campaign spending limits, political contributions, and public funding of political parties.

CANDIDATE NOMINATION PROCESSES

The BC Green Party recommended allowing Elections BC to modernize and automate the process by which MLA candidate nominators are verified, including expanding the definition of "signature" to include nomination consent by email or voice. The party suggested doing so would streamline registration, reduce administration burdens, and enable efficient follow-up. One individual recommended running party nominations through Elections BC to support transparency, accountability, and consistency. Multiple individuals suggested decreasing the role of party leadership in nomination processes, emphasizing the importance of public trust in nomination processes and accountability of representatives to their constituents. Suggestions included removing the ability of party leadership to sign nomination papers and ensuring nominations are not dependent on leader approval.

CAMPAIGN INFORMATION

The Committee heard that there is a need for improved information about candidates and their views during a campaign. Generation Squeeze stated that political parties are increasingly offering limited details to voters about policies and their costs, expressing that this is a concerning decline in transparency. The organization, along with other participants, recommended mandating all parties to release a detailed, costed platform within a specific timeframe.

Other individuals indicated that other sources of information about candidates, like an official website or questionnaire responses, would be preferable. One individual recommended requiring all candidates to fill out a comprehensive questionnaire administered by Elections BC and having Elections BC audit information distributed by candidates and parties. Other participants recommended creating an official and trustworthy webpage or database for voters to find information about candidates and their views.

The World Sikh Organization of Canada stated that candidates are increasingly avoiding town halls, debates, and public forums, suggesting that this limits opportunities for voters to engage with candidates and make informed choices. The organization recommended exploring incentives or guidelines that encourage participation in public forums.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Committee heard that Indigenous people, people of colour, people with disabilities, women, young people, and newcomers are some of the groups that remain underrepresented in elected positions. One individual emphasized that seeking election is challenging, and elected officials may face harassment, threats, and poor mental health. CityHive Youth Engagement Society recommended providing supports for young people seeking elected office such as training, child care, transportation stipends, and anti-harassment policies. Other participants supported establishing legal protection against harassment of candidates' family members, and making it safer and easier to run for office.

ACCESSING VOTERS IN MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS

Per the *Election Act*, housing cooperatives, landlords, and strata corporations are not permitted to unreasonably restrict access to residential property by candidates and authorized canvassers during the campaign period.

Several participants, including the BC NDP, CUPE BC, and multiple individuals, highlighted that despite this provision, candidates and canvassers may face issues accessing voters in multi-family buildings. They recommended that Elections BC proactively communicate with building managers, strata corporations, and co-op housing boards to highlight the requirement to provide candidates access to multi-unit buildings. The BC NDP specified that Elections BC should provide a notice, in plain language and in multiple languages, related to this requirement. Multiple participants supported strengthening enforcement of this provision, such as by introducing fines or other penalties for denying access to multi-unit buildings or creating a centralized hotline to report violations.

INFORMATION ABOUT VOTERS

The BC NDP noted that phone numbers and email addresses are not part of the voter information package provided to registered parties and candidates by Elections BC. CUPE BC indicated that without these methods of contact, political engagement efforts are limited because few people have landlines. Former MLA Bob D'Eith stated that sharing voters' contact information fosters engagement with candidates, noting that urbanization, secure-access housing, and large ridings have made traditional canvassing more difficult. Several participants recommended allowing Elections BC to collect and share voters' emails and phone numbers with registered political parties. Many participants specified that this should be subject to appropriate privacy safeguards and opt-out provisions. The BC NDP specified that voters should be able to select their preferred methods of contact.

One individual recommended prohibiting mass text messages from political parties, to protect voter privacy.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

With respect to campaign finance, the Committee heard general suggestions for reviewing or strengthening campaign finance rules. CUPE BC recommended undertaking a separate review of local and provincial campaign finance rules, stating this would ensure the legislation and its application are achieving their objectives. The BC Federation of Labour supported establishing a review panel to consult broadly and propose amendments to election finance laws, with the goal of removing corporate influence and ensuring civil society organizations can meaningfully participate. The organization

expressed concern that non-profits, community groups, and unions are expected to meet the same administrative requirements as multinational corporations and are required to register as third-party advertisers for activities such as hosting a candidate forum.

Several participants highlighted the importance of transparency in campaign finance. Recommendations included publishing a statement itemizing all sources of campaign funding 10 days prior to the election, penalizing candidates who provide false or incomplete statements of campaign funding, and implementing stricter limits and greater transparency in fundraising.

Two individuals suggested that lowering the vote threshold for candidates to qualify for campaign expense rebates would improve opportunities for smaller parties and independent candidates. Another individual stated that campaigns that collect more than \$10,000 need to spend a significant amount of money on an audit, posing a challenge for smaller parties. The Christian Heritage Party of BC recommended raising the audit threshold to \$25,000 and adjusting it each year to match inflation. Others recommended banning cryptocurrency donations and restricting political fundraising events.

CAMPAIGN SPENDING LIMITS

During the campaign period, political parties, candidates, and third-party election advertising sponsors are subject to expense limits. For the 2024 provincial general election, these limits were: \$5.07 million for political parties, \$71,700 for candidates, and \$3,708 per electoral district and \$185,431 overall for third-party election advertisers.

Several individuals recommended reducing campaign spending limits, with one suggesting a limit of \$35,000 per candidate. The Committee heard that capping campaign spending is necessary to maintain a level playing field and public trust. Others suggested that election advertising spending limits specifically should be lowered, and that party spending should be eliminated to restrict all campaign expenditures to the electoral district level.

Other participants supported increasing campaign spending limits. The No Proportional Representation BC Society recommended examining election campaign spending limits, noting that candidates need resources to reach every household in their riding. One individual recommended allowing independents to self-fund up to the campaign limit.

CUPE BC indicated that, if the writ period were extended, campaign spending limits should also be increased.

In terms of third-party spending, Democracy Watch noted that BC's spending limit applies equally to private corporations with only a few shareholders, big businesses, individuals, and citizen groups. The organization indicated that to support the principle of "one citizen, one vote," citizen groups with thousands of supporters should be able to spend more money on advertising. The organization recommended setting a low spending limit for individuals and businesses and basing the advertising and spending limits for third parties on the number of members in these organizations. One individual expressed concern that commercial property owners are donating advertising space to political campaigns without including it as part of their spending limits and recommended this be addressed.

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In BC, only provincial residents who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents are allowed to make political contributions—including of money, property, or services provided without compensation. Pursuant to section 186.01 of the *Election Act*, the political contribution limit is adjusted to inflation each year. The 2025 limit is \$1,484.38. Additionally, corporations, unions, and organizations are prohibited from making political contributions.

The Committee received recommendations for lowering the political contribution limit. Democracy Watch suggested lowering the individual political contribution limit to \$100 annually. Multiple individuals supported lowering the political contribution limit, with some suggesting \$1,000 or \$500. One individual stated that political contributions can provide more affluent communities a better chance to influence political parties, and recommended prohibiting political contributions. The No Proportional Representation BC Society indicated that election spending rules are too low, and recommended examining the total amount a person can give to a candidate.

Participants also discussed the tax benefits provided related to political contributions. An individual indicated that, because the Political Contribution Tax Credit is non-refundable, it does not benefit people whose income is too low to be taxable. The individual suggested making the tax credit refundable. CUPE BC recommended making donations to candidates in local government elections tax-deductible.

Multiple participants expressed support for reducing the role of corporations or other organizations in campaign financing. Participants indicated that campaign donations from corporations and lobbyists should be limited, so that elections are won through ideas and engagement with voters, not advertising spending. The Committee also heard about the importance of strengthening campaign contribution rules to limit outside influence and remove "big money" donations. Democracy Watch recommended banning gifts and loans from businesses, unions, and other organizations.

PUBLIC FUNDING

The Committee also heard about another source of funding for political parties: public funding. Pursuant to the *Election Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer must pay an annual allowance to registered political parties whose candidates received at least two percent of the vote in all electoral districts or at least five percent of the vote in electoral districts where the party endorsed candidates. For 2025, parties received \$1.85 per valid vote received in the 2024 provincial general election.

Some expressed general support for public funding, with recommendations including eliminating other sources of funding or exploring public funding through a citizens' assembly. Democracy Watch recommended establishing per-vote and donation-matching public funding if parties demonstrate it is needed.

Conversely, the Committee heard opposition to public funding of political parties. One individual recommended prohibiting parties from receiving public funding, suggesting instead that political party funding should be limited to membership fees and capped member, corporation, or union donations. Another individual recommended replacing the per-vote allowances with a standardized flat allowance per MLA, suggesting this would discourage partisanship and support individual representation.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee reflected on various aspects of political campaigns, from the perspectives of both candidates and voters. Committee Members suggested that candidate nomination processes could be modernized to be more inclusive and give all residents of an electoral district an equal opportunity to nominate a candidate. Some Members indicated that existing candidate nomination processes are effective and should not be altered, while others identified a

need to update processes and embrace technological change. The Committee emphasized that any changes must include strong verification processes and security.

Members also agreed that voters should have access to accurate information about candidates and their positions in advance of elections, particularly given the emerging impacts of artificial intelligence and deepfakes. The Committee identified that one possible option would be to have Elections BC include links to websites designated by each candidate as part of the list of verified candidates, but noted that preserving the non-partisanship of Elections BC is crucial. Members agreed that Elections BC should study options for ensuring that voters have access to verifiable, non-partisan information during elections.

With respect to costed party platforms, some Members emphasized that they are an important resource for voters and should be made available by a set deadline. Other Members noted that when a platform is released and what it contains is an aspect of parties' campaign strategies and should be left to their discretion. Committee Members also emphasized that attending public forums and debates provides an important opportunity for voters to learn about candidates and ask them questions while acknowledging concerns about harassment and physical safety, and the importance of allowing candidates to determine how to campaign and spend their time. While Members acknowledged the importance of costed party platforms and public debates to voters, they concluded that decisions in this regard are best left to individual parties and candidates.

The Committee reflected on the different opportunities that candidates and parties have to contact potential voters, both during the campaign period and outside of it. Committee Members highlighted provisions in the *Election Act* that require owners and managers of multi-unit buildings to allow candidates and canvassers in buildings during the campaign period, and agreed that communication and enforcement related to these provisions should be strengthened. They discussed their experiences canvassing in multi-unit buildings and mobile home parks and identified that access to voters is important. The Committee recognized that individual residences may display "no solicitation" signs and emphasized that candidates and canvassers should respect these.

Additionally, Committee Members observed that political parties may face challenges contacting people who only use cell phones, as the numbers are not listed publicly. The

Committee agreed that Elections BC should share voter contact information with political parties, and emphasized the importance of accountability and public reporting for any new responsibilities assigned to Elections BC. Members further discussed the role of mass texts from political parties, agreeing that they are an appropriate form of communication during an election, but emphasizing that they should include robust and meaningful opt-out provisions, not reveal individuals' contact information by placing them in a group chat, and identify who is sending the message. The Committee agreed that these concerns could be addressed through cooperation between the provincial and federal governments.

With respect to campaign finance, the Committee emphasized the importance of timely and effective enforcement of existing rules. Committee Members noted that when concerns are raised by candidates or the public about alleged violations of campaign finance rules, it is often challenging to ensure they are addressed in a timely manner. Members indicated it could be beneficial for Elections BC to have stronger enforcement powers that ensure violations are addressed before it is too late to avoid their intended impact. The Committee also noted that cryptocurrency is currently allowed as a political contribution but expressed concern about the lack of transparency regarding how cryptocurrency operates. Members noted that cryptocurrency contributions are accepted in other Canadian jurisdictions and may be appealing to some contributors, but agreed that there is not currently an adequate regulatory framework in place to ensure cryptocurrency is handled in a secure and transparent manner.

The Committee also reflected on concerns raised by consultation participants about the number of election signs displayed on commercial property in certain areas of the province. Members noted that, in addition to the provisions in the *Election Act* regarding advertising, municipalities may make their own rules regarding election signs, and that there may be opportunities to tighten the rules regarding election signage or strengthen enforcement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

22. Enable Elections BC to modernize and automate the process by which MLA candidate nominators are verified.
23. Require Elections BC to collect and share voters' email addresses and mobile phone numbers with registered political parties and candidates under strict privacy guidelines, and ensure Elections BC begins this work by a set deadline and reports publicly on its implementation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

24. Work with the federal government to review regulations and enforcement related to digital communications from political parties.
25. Review the timeliness and efficacy of Elections BC's campaign finance enforcement powers to ensure they are sufficient.
26. Evaluate a ban on cryptocurrency donations until such a time as a more fulsome regulatory regime for cryptocurrency is in place.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

27. Examine the feasibility of developing a centralized, non-partisan resource to provide voters verifiable information about candidates.
28. Strengthen communication and enforcement related to access to multi-unit buildings for candidates and their campaigns, as established in the *Election Act*.

PARLIAMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES

As part of its consultation, the Committee received input about strengthening BC's parliamentary democracy as well as the operations of political parties. Participants made recommendations about the role of whipped votes, caucus leadership, bills and parliamentary committees, and enhancing collaboration within the Legislative Assembly. The Committee also received input about Members' work in their constituencies. Regarding political parties, participants identified opportunities to improve regulation and oversight, diversity and inclusion, and privacy protections.

PARTY SYSTEM AND PARTY DISCIPLINE

Regarding the role of parties and caucuses, several participants expressed concern about the strength of party discipline and the role of whipped votes, including in terms of Members' ability to represent their constituents. Dr. Maxwell Cameron, a professor at the University of British Columbia, indicated that free votes are an important tool to ensure meaningful discussion. Several individuals recommended reducing party discipline and allowing more free votes in the Legislative Assembly. Other participants recommended ending whipped votes and reforming or removing the roles of Whip and House Leader, asserting that the hierarchical nature of political parties is undemocratic.

The Committee also heard support for reducing the role of political parties and caucuses or eliminating them entirely. Participants suggested that minimizing the impact of parties can enhance cooperation, with some recommending reducing their role, taking party names off ballots, or restricting party branding during campaigns.

Multiple individuals recommended eliminating political parties and having candidates run as independents, indicating that Members should be focused on representing their constituents and reaching consensus. One individual noted that Nunavut and the Northwest Territories operate on a consensus basis. Additionally, the Committee heard that the Members could form regional caucuses rather than party caucuses.

PARTY AND CAUCUS LEADERSHIP

The Committee also received suggestions for modifying party leadership races. The BC Green Party recommended authorizing Elections BC to oversee the administration of the election of provincial political party leaders, highlighting Elections BC's expertise in voter validation, impartial oversight, and secure process management. One individual supported reforming internal party leadership selection processes, including prohibiting candidate fees and banning party conventions. Another participant suggested that party leaders be elected by MLAs, rather than party members.

Democracy Watch recommended empowering MLAs to represent voters by restricting the powers of the Premier and all party leaders. The Committee also heard that caucuses should be enabled to remove party leadership, that independent Members should receive research and staffing support, and that official party status should be based on a percentage of the vote, not a number of seats.

Some participants expressed concern about the power of the Premier's Office and Cabinet, emphasizing that decision-making power should be held by the Legislature. One individual noted that Cabinet and parliamentary secretary appointments go to Members of the government caucus, and suggested that providing at least one Cabinet and parliamentary secretary appointment for each five percent of the vote that a party receives could encourage transparency and the inclusion of different views in decision-making. Other recommendations include allowing MLAs to select the Premier through a secret ballot after the election.

WORK OF PARLIAMENT

The Committee heard perspectives on changing how the Legislative Assembly operates, including about bills, seating and committees, and the importance of collaboration. With respect to bills, two individuals expressed concern about long bills and bills that address multiple topics. Other participants recommended mandating that all bills be introduced by Private

Members (MLAs who are not part of Cabinet) or committees and creating more opportunities for the introduction and consideration of Private Members' bills.

With respect to seating, participants stated that the organization of seating in the Legislative Chamber does not promote cooperation and suggested that seating and office assignments should be randomized. An individual noted that MLAs from the same area of province may not sit near each other, which may make it more challenging to discuss key regional issues.

Participants emphasized that parliamentary committees are valuable and should meet on a regular basis. Dr. Cameron and other individuals recommended strengthening the role of legislative committees. Another individual recommended ensuring that committee work is done by representatives who have expertise or interest in the issue.

Additionally, the Committee heard that parties should work together to build consensus and develop policies that benefit the majority of people. Jeremy Caradonna, a city councillor from the City of Victoria, suggested that Members could draw inspiration from the collaborative culture of local government. Participants recommended creating opportunities for collaborative, multi-party governance inside and outside of the Legislative Assembly.

CONSTITUENCY WORK

In addition to the work of Parliament, the Committee heard about the work that Members do in their constituencies. The Samara Centre for Democracy highlighted its 2018 report in which Members of Parliament indicated that constituency work was a source of burnout. The organization recommended having constituency offices be managed centrally by the Legislative Assembly, with participation from Service BC and municipal representatives. The Centre indicated that removing some case work duties could create capacity for constituency offices to become centres for democratic engagement.

Other participants emphasized the importance of constituents being able to meet with their MLA and MLAs with large ridings receiving the necessary resources to have multiple constituency offices.

REGULATION AND OVERSIGHT OF PARTIES

Multiple individuals recommended strengthening oversight of political parties, such as by requiring each registered political

party to issue an annual report to the Legislative Assembly on its activities and finances. One individual suggested strengthening recall legislation so that the electorate can hold officials accountable.

Other participants recommended reforming campaign and party regulations. One individual emphasized the important role of independents and smaller parties in a representative democracy, and indicated that regulatory frameworks favour larger, well-established parties. Another individual recommended mandating that political parties register as not-for-profit entities and be taxed accordingly.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The BC Federation of Labour stated that many groups, including Indigenous, Black, racialized, working class, and LGBTQ2S+ people, and people with disabilities, continue to be underrepresented in the Legislative Assembly. The organization recommended requiring all political parties to adopt transparent equity policies and publicly report on the diversity of their nominated candidates. Dr. Cameron recommended making public funding for parties conditional on meeting diversity and equity goals.

PRIVACY

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association highlighted a 2019 report by BC's Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner which found that political parties had not made reasonable security arrangements to prevent the unauthorized access and disclosure of personal information in their custody. The organization recommended introducing modernizing and rights-focused reforms to the *Personal Information Protection Act*, including mandatory breach reporting, mandatory privacy impact assessments, and stronger oversight and penalization of parties' non-consensual collection of personal information. Additionally, the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association recommended requiring political parties to institute privacy management programs like those required by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, which include extensive training.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee reflected on the work of the Legislative Assembly and the importance of parliamentary democracy. Committee Members agreed that there may be opportunities

to strengthen collaboration between Members of different caucuses and to better inform the public about the collaborative work already taking place. They suggested that there are opportunities to support collaboration through both formal legislative structures, such as parliamentary committees, and on a personal level such as through shared meals. The Committee reflected on the work done by the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture in the 42nd Parliament and identified that re-establishing the Working Group could be an effective method to improve collaboration and the culture of the Legislative Assembly generally, as well as to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of parliamentary spaces.

Additionally, the Committee highlighted the important role of parliamentary committees and Private Members' Business. With respect to parliamentary committees, Members reflected on the collaborative and collegial work and relationship-building that is facilitated in this venue, including with this Committee, and were of the view that parliamentary committees should be used more frequently, such as by providing terms of reference to inactive select standing committees. For Private Members' Business, Committee Members reflected on the changes made in the last Parliament to strengthen opportunities for Private Members to meaningfully advance items of business, and agreed that a parliamentary committee should be tasked with reviewing these changes to ensure their effectiveness.

Committee Members discussed the resources and remuneration received by Members and caucuses. They noted that caucuses with official party status receive additional funding, and emphasized that funding should not be a barrier to Members sitting as independent Members should they wish to do so. The Committee emphasized that the current funding formula may be sufficient, but this should be confirmed through a careful evaluation. Additionally, the Committee reflected on opportunities to improve Members' compensation and funding more broadly, highlighting caucus funding, the allowance that funds Members' accommodation

in Victoria (the Capital City Living Allowance), and Members' remuneration and allowances generally. Members agreed that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee should undertake a review of these funding sources to ensure they are sufficient and equitable.

Committee Members discussed how free votes can play an important role in the thorough consideration of legislation and in allowing Members to effectively represent their constituents. They further observed that the potential for confidence votes is something that may limit the use of free votes, and explored whether there could be opportunities to clarify or codify what can be designated as a matter of confidence. Members concluded that there are well-established conventions around matters of confidence and that some of the considerations or potential changes in this regard are ultimately political questions.

While Members acknowledged the importance of existing accountability mechanisms such as scrutiny in the media and advocacy by members of the public, they agreed that oversight and regulation of political parties should be strengthened. Members indicated that having independent oversight of provincial party leaders may be helpful to build trust in the political system. Committee Members reflected on other possible aspects of enhanced oversight, including ensuring that the information Members share with a party when they join is not used to discourage them from leaving the party and that parties do not suspend their campaigns during the writ period. Additionally, Committee Members supported conducting an evaluation of the privacy provisions affecting political parties, including regarding non-consensual collection of personal information from household members that canvassers are speaking to.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

29. Appoint a parliamentary committee to review the changes made to Private Members' Business to ensure they are effectively enabling Private Members to advance legislative initiatives.

30. Re-establish the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture to monitor the implementation of its previous recommendations as well as consider:
 - a. additional opportunities for collaboration between Members of different caucuses, in both formal legislative processes and outside;
 - b. improving the inclusivity and accessibility of parliamentary spaces.
31. Examine opportunities to increase the effective use of parliamentary committees to facilitate collaboration.
32. Strengthen the regulation and oversight of BC's political parties, including authorizing Elections BC to oversee the administration of the election of party leaders.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

33. Review the sufficiency and equity of Members' remuneration and allowances, and the funding formula for caucuses and independent Members.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

34. Evaluate amending the *Personal Information Protection Act* to require mandatory breach reporting, mandatory privacy impact assessments, and privacy management programs for political parties, as well as stronger oversight and penalization of parties' non-consensual collection of personal information.

ELECTORAL REFORM

A major area of focus during the Committee's consultation was the province's electoral system. The Committee received input related to retaining and changing electoral systems as well as the opportunities and challenges presented by each electoral system. Participants also provided perspectives on how electoral reform could be undertaken and implemented in BC. The Committee also received recommendations about electoral reform at the local government level.

BACKGROUND

BC currently uses the first-past-the-post (FPTP) or single member plurality electoral system. FPTP also serves as the electoral system in other provinces and territories across Canada, the country's federal elections, and in other jurisdictions, including the United States and the UK. Under FPTP, the province is divided into electoral districts, and each district is represented by one MLA. Parties nominate a single candidate in each district. Voters mark their ballot for one candidate and the candidate with the most votes in the district wins a seat in the Legislative Assembly. The distribution of seats results from the outcome of the election in each individual district and a party's share of the popular vote does not directly determine the number of seats the party wins in the Legislative Assembly. This system is sometimes called "winner takes all," because candidates can win their seat without a majority of the votes.

FPTP was first used when the province entered Confederation in 1871 and has been in place for much of BC's history. Some districts elected multiple MLAs until 1990, following which all districts became single-member districts. The exceptions to the use of FPTP were the 1952 and 1953 provincial general elections which used a ranked-choice voting system, before returning to FPTP in 1956.

BC has considered and held referenda on electoral reform on three occasions in the last 25 years. On April 30, 2003, the Legislative Assembly unanimously supported the creation of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and the Citizens'

Assembly received its Terms of Reference by Order in Council on May 16. The BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was created to consider different electoral systems for BC provincial elections and to recommend whether FPTP should be retained or whether a new system should be adopted. In December 2004, the Assembly released its final report which recommended adopting BC Single Transferable Vote (BC STV) and holding a referendum.

BC's first referendum on electoral reform was held in conjunction with the 2005 provincial general election. The ballot question, as established in the Citizens' Assembly's final report, read: "Should British Columbia change to the BC STV electoral system, as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform — yes, or no?" For the referendum results to be binding on government, BC STV had to receive at least 60 percent of valid votes provincewide, and a simple majority of 50 percent plus one in at least half of electoral districts. Provincewide, BC STV received about 58 percent of votes, falling short of the 60 percent threshold; 77 out of 79 electoral districts achieved the simple majority threshold.

A second referendum was announced in the September 2005 Speech from the Throne. The 2009 referendum on electoral reform was also held in conjunction with the provincial election and had the same two thresholds. In this instance, the ballot question was: "Which electoral system should British Columbia use to elect members of the provincial Legislative Assembly — the existing electoral system of first-past-the-post, or the single transferable vote electoral system, proposed by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform?" About 61 percent of voters supported keeping FPTP, while 39 percent of voters supported adopting STV.

BC held another referendum in 2018. That ballot featured two questions. The first was: "Which system should British Columbia use for provincial elections?" Voters could opt for either the current FPTP system, or a proportional representation system. The second question was: "If British Columbia adopts a proportional representation voting system,

which of the following voting systems do you prefer?" Voters were asked to rank in order of preference Dual Member Proportional, Mixed-Member Proportional, and Rural-Urban Proportional. Unlike previous referenda, this was a stand-alone event which was conducted by mail-in ballot. The threshold for the results of the first question to be binding on government was set at 50 percent plus one vote. Just over 61 percent of voters supported keeping FPTP, while 39 percent supported adopting a PR system, rendering the results of the second question moot.

FIRST-PAST-THE-POST

With respect to support for the existing electoral system, the No Proportional Representation BC Society stated that FPTP provides accountable, local representation by elected officials who are known to their constituents and can be removed from office. The Society, along with several individuals, noted that FPTP provides a stable government and has helped BC strengthen its economy, social services, and education system as well as protect the environment. The Society highlighted that one of the main advantages of FPTP is that it is easy for voters to understand. Several individuals added that tabulating ballots is simple, and the process can happen locally. One individual was of the view that calls for electoral reform often reflect a desire to prioritize party vote totals over representation by population. They added that claims that FPTP results in "false majorities" overlook the fact that each election is a separate contest in a specific constituency. Participants also argued that reforms may weaken the accountability and diversity built into the current system, especially when there are wide regional variations in political views.

Many submissions and presentations shared their perspectives on the challenges with FPTP. With regards to representation, approximately 330 participants stated that FPTP distorts results since the overall number of seats a party wins does not reflect the share of the popular vote it receives. Fair Voting BC and Voting BC stated that the use of single-member districts under FPTP amplifies small margins of victory into total control of ridings, adding that a party can often win majority power with significantly less than majority popular support. Apathy is Boring highlighted a study showing that disproportionality leads to higher dissatisfaction with election outcomes, as people not only want their preferred party to win, but also want to feel that elections are fair. Another common theme was that participants felt that their vote does not matter

and that they are not represented. Springtide Collective for Democracy noted that on average half of voters have not helped elect an MLA, meaning that they do not have their own representative advocating for their political views in the Legislative Assembly. Participants also expressed concerns that FPTP wastes votes, limits representation, or disenfranchises voters.

The Committee also received input on how BC's geography affects electoral outcomes under FPTP. Participants indicated that the existing system exaggerates rural-urban polarization and creates disproportionate outcomes which concentrate representation for political parties in certain regions. They added that without elected representatives in certain areas, a party may become less sensitive to those areas' political interests and demands, which contributes to a sense of regional alienation. Fair Voting BC stated that the regional divides in election results can make it difficult for the Premier to form a regionally balanced Cabinet, potentially diminishing the voices of underrepresented regions in government policy. Participants including the BC Green Party and CUPE BC discussed the implications of ridings being perceived as competitive or safe, which they stated encourages parties to focus on certain ridings instead of competing for everyone's votes and determines the power of an individual's vote based on where they live. One individual also noted that competitive or "swing" ridings make BC's elections vulnerable to foreign interference because these races can be easily swayed by manipulating a small number of votes.

Many participants, including Fair Vote Canada and the Hospital Employees' Union, expressed concerns that FPTP contributes to low voter turnout and disengagement, and leads to vote splitting or strategic voting. Apathy is Boring stated that when votes feel ineffective and outcomes seem predetermined, participation suffers, and the perceived necessity of strategic voting further undermines the sense of fairness. With safe seats in particular, participants noted that voters may feel their votes are wasted as they feel their participation has no impact, leading to disengagement, frustration, and distrust. CentreBC highlighted that FPTP often yields outcomes that are contrary to voter intention as people are often voting against something rather than voting for their values, making them feel unheard and disengaged. Others were of the view that political polarization is a key feature of FPTP as it forces a two-party dynamic, leading to strategic voting, reducing complex issues to binary choices, and creating a competitive and hostile environment which rewards divisiveness. Several individuals

additionally stated that FPTP provides opportunities for extremist candidates and parties to gain power, noting that when voters feel disenfranchised and powerless, they are more likely to turn to extremism and violence.

The Committee also heard that FPTP limits or denies representation to those who support smaller parties and independents, reducing political diversity. CentreBC discussed how FPTP leads to an unbalanced political landscape where parties with broad but shallow support across the province often win few or no seats and those with regionally concentrated support can gain disproportionate influence. Fair Voting BC added that FPTP does not adequately represent the diversity of voter preferences and creates a two-party political system by marginalizing smaller parties and voices, creating a feedback loop of political disengagement, as voters come to believe their values and perspectives will not be represented. Leadnow Society and Dr. Sarah Wiebe from the University of Victoria highlighted that FPTP does not serve all segments of society equally well, as many minority, marginalized, and racialized voices are excluded from decision-making, which diminishes the effectiveness of public policy implementation and creates legislative bodies that do not reflect the lived realities and needs of the whole province. Several participants suggested that BC's current electoral system leads to too much focus on political party affiliation, rather than individual candidates and their qualifications. The Committee also heard from the BC Green Party and Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice that FPTP discourages cooperation, consensus, or meaningful dialogue on policy issues since there is no incentive for politicians to work cooperatively with members of opposing parties, except in the rare instances of a minority government.

Another theme was the stability of the FPTP system. Dr. Dennis Pilon from York University stated that no country selecting a democratic system for the first time has ever chosen FPTP as it has been deemed too risky and too unstable. In terms of government stability, one individual noted that slight differences in votes or regional distribution of votes within a single election can lead to major changes and that instability across elections leads to diminished consistency in governance and promotion of adversarial politics. Regarding policy stability and efficacy, the Hospital Employees' Union stated that FPTP systems have negative impacts on long-term planning, governance, and policy continuity as a shift in governing party can result in policy lurch, leading to inefficiencies, creating

economic uncertainty, and diminishing public trust. BC Poverty Reduction Coalition added that this prevents the development of stable, long-term solutions to complex challenges faced by the province.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Proportional representation (PR) refers to a family of electoral systems designed to produce proportional results. The basic principle of PR is that the share of seats a political party wins in the Legislative Assembly is about the same as the party's share of the popular vote. For example, if a party receives 40 percent of the popular vote, it would receive about 40 percent of the seats in the Legislative Assembly.

Approximately 442 participants advocated for the adoption of a PR system without specifying a specific form. Nine participants recommended adopting a PR system as soon as possible while others recommended adopting a PR system before the next election, adopting a PR system on a trial basis, or adopting a PR system with specific characteristics. Many participants expressed that they are in favour of any PR system but did not feel prepared to recommend a specific form of PR.

Many supporters, including Fair Vote Canada, stated that PR ensures fairer and more balanced representation for all voters as seats in the Legislature closely reflect the popular support for each party. Several participants highlighted that PR systems are more inclusive of smaller parties allowing for more political diversity and representative governance. Supporters of PR also indicated that voters would feel like their voices matter more, as it ensures every vote contributes to the outcome, no matter where someone lives, allaying fears of vote-splitting and strategic voting and safeguarding against political polarization.

Others stated that PR makes it easier to elect legislatures that reflect the province's population. Unlock Democracy added that under PR more candidates from underrepresented communities may choose to run because the environment is more collaborative than under FPTP. Dr. Wiebe noted that mechanisms that expand voters' choices for candidate selection can enhance representation for women, Indigenous peoples, and other racialized groups, highlighting the increase in Māori representation under New Zealand's specific PR system. Some participants acknowledged that an emphasis is typically placed on PR's ability to better reflect parties' shares of the popular vote in comparison to FPTP. They also noted

that some PR systems can balance both proportional and local representation through the addition of multi-member districts or regions, with Apathy is Boring emphasizing that local representation must be a core principle of any PR system adopted by the province.

Participants further stated that PR systems tend to encourage cooperative decision-making and compromise. Dr. Pilon discussed how the social weight to policy is much greater in PR countries because there is a higher degree of consensus around the policies being put forward. Participants additionally identified that PR reduces policy lurch by promoting durable coalitions necessary for long-term policymaking. They noted that PR systems deliver election results that make representatives work collaboratively across party lines to determine the best legislation and policies which helps to prevent policy swings following changes in government. Ecojustice noted that by facilitating a greater diversity of perspectives into the Legislature and encouraging coalition governments, PR increases political diversity, improves dialogue, and results in more effective policies that have greater buy-in from political parties and last significantly longer. Dr. Pilon identified that an electoral system's stability can be judged based on how long governments last and the frequency of elections, noting that a comparison of elections across Western countries indicates that PR governments last almost as long as FPTP governments do and that Canada has had more elections than most PR countries.

The Committee also received input from approximately 28 opponents of PR. The No Proportional Representation BC Society stated that PR is complicated, confusing, and removes local accountability for elected officials. Stability was also identified as an issue, with several participants noting that PR tends to produce unstable coalition governments, frequent elections, and delays in government formation after an election. Several participants, including Equal Vote Coalition, raised concerns about certain PR models placing too much emphasis on political parties at the expense of local representation, weakening the relationship between MLAs and the ridings they represent. With respect to political diversity, several participants highlighted that under PR, too many small parties can gain seats, and extremist parties can gain enough support to be represented in the Legislature. A common argument against electoral reform and PR was that British Columbians have already spoken against it in multiple referenda.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL

The Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system is a combination of FPTP and PR that uses single-member and regional districts. Under MMP, the province would be divided into electoral districts which are grouped into regions. Each district has one district representative elected by getting the most votes in their district using FPTP. Each region has several regional representatives who are elected from a party list to ensure that overall results are proportional. A party's district seats and regional seats added together roughly match its share of the popular vote. Typically, a party must receive above a minimum threshold of the popular vote to get any regional seats. A party's seats are filled first by any district seats won, and any remaining seats are filled by candidates from its party list. In many MMP systems, voters cast two votes on one ballot: one for the local single-member district and one for the preferred candidate or party at the regional level. In other forms, voters cast one vote for a district candidate that also counts for that candidate's party. MMP was one of three options on the ballot for the 2018 referendum on electoral reform.

Approximately 43 participants, including Adriane Carr, co-founder and former leader of the BC Green Party, recommended adopting an MMP electoral system. The Committee heard that MMP allows people to vote for a local candidate who will capably serve their constituency as well as vote for a party that aligns with their values. CUPE BC stated that MMP systems offer direct accountability of MLAs to their electoral districts, and proportional representation of diverse partisan preferences. Multiple individuals emphasized that MMP's dual-vote structure allows voters to feel like their voices are being heard, enhances voter engagement, and can lead to more representative legislatures. Several individuals also noted that MMP allows voters to support candidates who reflect their values without having to consider strategic voting.

Several individuals identified that MMP allows smaller parties to gain more seats and that setting a threshold of the popular vote required to win any seats reduces the number of fringe parties and limits extremism. In terms of collaboration, participants discussed how MMP encourages cooperative decision-making and compromise and leads parties to seek coalitions. Two individuals noted that MMP allows jurisdictions to form governments quickly, demonstrate political stability, and foster better long-term policy continuity. Regarding the

system's complexity, one individual stated that jurisdictions using MMP report higher voter comprehension of electoral systems. Another suggested that people learn complex tasks regularly and are capable of understanding MMP, and simply need to be convinced that they will benefit from a better system.

Committee Members also heard from participants who were opposed to the adoption of an MMP system. Equal Vote Coalition indicated that MMP entrenches partisan voting behavior and vote-splitting by using a separate party vote. Voter Equality stated that MMP relies on the flawed idea that an MLA can represent everyone in their district and that single-member districts guarantee local representation, adding that an electoral system cannot have local representation if only 50 percent of voters are represented. The organization underscored that the system also sacrifices local representation by increasing the size of single-member districts so that additional MLAs can be elected in a proportional manner.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

Single Transferable Vote (STV) or proportional-ranked choice voting is a multi-winner electoral system which allows each voter to cast a single vote by ranking candidates in terms of preference. To be elected, a candidate must reach a certain number of votes called the electoral quota, which is specific to each electoral district based on the number of seats for the district and the number of votes cast. Under BC STV, the electoral system that was recommended by the 2003 BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, single-member districts are combined into larger, multiple-member districts. Parties may run multiple candidates, and voters in the district rank all candidates. All voters' first preference votes are counted, and the counting process continues until all seats in the district have been filled by candidates meeting the electoral quota. If required, further rounds of counting are used to transfer votes from candidates who are elected with surplus votes or who are dropped from the ballot having received the fewest votes. These votes are then transferred to candidates who are still on the ballot and may be voters' second or third choices. A change to BC STV was the subject of the 2005 referendum on electoral reform and voters had to choose between BC STV and FPTP in the 2009 referendum on electoral reform.

Approximately 62 participants recommended adopting an STV electoral system. Participants noted that STV promotes proportionality as well as local accountability by directly electing local representatives rather than using party lists. Several individuals indicated that STV empowers voters by maximizing choice, allowing voters to cast their ballot either for individuals by ranked choice or along party lines. The Committee also heard that multi-member ridings are more likely to ensure that elected representatives accurately reflect the spectrum of public opinion and provide voters access to a representative more in line with their thinking. Voter Equality added that since most voters will have an MLA they voted for, multiple points of view will be represented in each district, and a fuller picture of each district's needs will be heard in party caucuses and the Legislature.

With regards to voter engagement, Voter Equality highlighted that STV provides more choice to voters as political parties may opt to run multiple candidates, giving voters a say in the party's nomination process and providing more opportunity for diversity and greater gender balance. The Committee also heard that the system also allows voters to vote across party lines and provides independent candidates with a real chance of winning elections. Participants also noted that ranked choice voting, a part of STV, creates a more civil and cooperative political atmosphere which allows similarly aligned candidates to endorse each other and campaign together rather than worrying about vote-splitting.

Several participants discussed how an STV electoral system produces more stable, centrist governments, which foster cooperation and reward representatives that are community-builders. Other participants highlighted that several jurisdictions have successfully used STV showing that the system is not too complicated to understand or implement.

In terms of those opposed to STV, several individuals stated that STV would be difficult to implement in BC as to achieve proportionality, Northern BC would become a single riding, and many rural ridings would be much larger. Another participant identified that BC-STV is a "made in BC" system which has not been tested elsewhere. Several participants cited past referenda on electoral reform as evidence that STV is too complicated for people to understand. Regarding voter choice, one individual stated that voters cannot be expected to make their second and third choices based on a hypothetical scenario in which their first choice is not available. Equal Vote Coalition also indicated that STV dilutes local accountability,

splits votes, lacks transparency, can fail to elect consensus winners, weights votes unevenly, and shows high voter error rates.

OTHER PROPORTIONAL SYSTEMS

Regional Representation

Approximately 15 participants recommended adopting a Regional Representation electoral system. Regional Representation is a hybrid approach originally proposed by Fair Voting BC and Fair Vote Canada in 2016. This system uses multi-member districts with as few as two or three seats, along with a relatively small number of top-up seats to ensure that the overall seat balance in each region closely matches the overall vote share.

The Committee heard that the Regional Representation model aims to balance proportionality, regional accountability, and meaningful voter choice. Fair Voting BC highlighted that the system encourages parties to put forward more demographically diverse slates of candidates, gives voters increased choice over whom to elect, and promotes greater diversity overall. Springtide Collective for Democracy noted that small and emerging political parties benefit by having to recruit fewer candidates, which lowers campaign expenses and allows for better training. In terms of complexity, several individuals commented that the Regional Representation model is simple to understand and implement.

Rural-Urban Proportional Representation

Approximately 10 participants recommended adopting a Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP) electoral system. RUP system combines two different proportional voting systems, MMP and STV. MMP would be used for single-member districts and regional districts in rural parts of the province while STV would be used for multi-member districts in urban areas. Each rural district would have one district MLA and several regional MLAs. Urban districts would be larger than under FPTP and represented by two to seven MLAs. Results across the province are likely to be generally proportional, so the share of seats a party gets in the Legislature roughly matches its share of the vote. RUP was one of three options on the ballot for the 2018 referendum on electoral reform.

Committee Members heard from proponents of the RUP system who highlighted that it would provide strong local and regional representation while addressing BC's unique

geography by limiting large, underpopulated ridings and using regional top-up seats in these areas to ensure proportionality. Another participant added that the process of ranking candidates used by RUP is a straightforward and familiar process.

The Committee also heard from one opponent of the RUP system who argued that it does not improve representation for people, especially those living in "safe ridings" who are currently unable to elect their desired candidate under FPTP.

Dual Member Proportional

Members heard from two participants who recommended adopting the Dual Member Proportional (DMP) electoral system. Under DMP, most electoral districts would be represented by two MLAs. However, the electoral system in the largest rural districts would remain unchanged. The first seat in dual-member districts is won by the candidate with the most votes and is filled by the candidate listed first on the ballot. The second seat is determined using the breakdown of the popular vote by political party. A party's second seats are filled in districts where its candidates did particularly well. Parties would need to reach a popular vote threshold to receive second seats, and independent candidates that finish first or second would win their seat. DMP was one of three options on the ballot for the 2018 referendum on electoral reform.

Supporters of DMP stated that the system combines proportional representation with local accountability, maximizing local representation by avoiding party lists and regional top-ups. They added that since DMP allows for the proportional allocation of seats, smaller parties and minority voices have a better chance of gaining representation, leading to a Legislature that more accurately reflects the population. Regarding collaboration, they noted that DMP encourages cooperation and coalitions between parties, leading to policy with greater support across the political spectrum.

Party-List PR

Under Party-List PR, each political party lists its candidates on the ballot, and voters select one of those lists. Each party is then allocated a number of seats roughly proportional to its share of the vote. Lists can be open (voters express a preference among the candidates of their chosen party) or closed (voters express a preference only for a party, and the party determines which candidates from the list secure

seats). When the number of seats for each party has been determined, they are filled by the candidates at the top of each list.

Multi-Member Districts

Multi-member districts (MMD) maintain geographically defined districts but add additional seats in each district to create more proportional election results. The Committee heard from approximately five participants recommending MMD PR systems. Dr. Fred Cutler from the University of British Columbia stated that MMDs increase voter turnout and engagement, because having more electable members increases candidate diversity and the likelihood of electing a candidate that a voter agrees with. Participants also noted that while an MMD system is unlikely to empower fringe parties or extremist views, it would increase representation for underrepresented groups. In terms of stability, participants highlighted that MMDs produce the same number of elections and since they encourage cooperation are more likely to result in stable, majority governments.

Weighted Voting in the Legislative Assembly

Committee Members heard from three participants who recommended adopting a Weighted Member Proportional Representation (WMPR) system. WMPR is a system which would weight MLAs' votes on legislative matters by their party's share of the popular vote. They emphasized that this system would ensure that each vote cast in an election would have the same impact on votes in the Legislature. With regards to extremism, they noted that since a party would have to elect at least one Member before its share of the popular vote is represented in the Legislature, extreme views would be kept in check. Individuals also highlighted that WMPR would be the simplest and fastest means of implementing PR at very little cost since no changes are required to electoral boundaries or the ballot.

RANKED CHOICE SYSTEMS

Ranked choice systems are also known as Alternative Voting, preferential voting, or instant-runoff voting. Under ranked choice systems, voters mark their ballots by ranking candidates in terms of preference. Each party is represented by one candidate on the ballot. If no candidate has a majority after counting the first preferences in a district, the candidate with the fewest first preference votes is eliminated, and their votes are transferred to the second preferences on those ballots. This

continues until a single candidate achieves a majority of the votes in their district and wins the seat. Ranked choice systems are not a form of PR; instead, ranked choice systems ensure that the elected candidate has support from the majority of voters in their district.

Approximately 56 participants recommended adopting a ranked choice voting system. CentreBC emphasized that ranked choice voting provides a more democratic, inclusive, and representative way to elect MLAs while preserving local representation through single-member ridings. The Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments added that ranked choice voting ensures that elected leaders enjoy a broad base of support from the people they serve. Approximately 14 participants stated that a ranked ballot system would reduce strategic voting by incentivizing voters to vote according to their sincere beliefs by listing their preferred candidates in order. Several participants emphasized that ranked choice voting encourages meaningful voter participation as it allows British Columbians to communicate their preferences with more nuance.

Additionally, participants stated that ranked choice systems encourage broader appeal, increase civility in political conversations, and reduce polarization and strategic voting. In doing so, participants added that these systems could restore confidence in the democratic process and encourage a more respectful legislature. Several participants also noted that ranked choice voting makes it easier to elect a Legislative Assembly that reflects BC's diversity. Concerning extremism, Creatively United for the Planet Society noted that ranked choice voting reduces fringe candidates as extreme positions attract fewer votes in subsequent vote transfers. With regards to collaboration, the Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments highlighted that ranked choice voting pressures political parties to compromise and appeal to the broader population to ensure victory. Participants also noted that ranked ballot systems are easy for voters to understand and simpler to implement than PR. CentreBC added that the system will be familiar to many voters since many major political parties in BC and across Canada already use it to elect their leaders.

The Committee also heard from participants who were opposed to ranked choice voting systems. Approximately 31 participants emphasized that ranked choice voting is just another form of FPTP. Fair Vote Canada and Apathy is Boring identified that ranked ballots in single-member districts remain

“winner take all” and although they appear to offer reform, do not address the core problems of FPTP as they do not produce proportional outcomes.

Participants further stated that ranked choice ballots in single-member districts are insufficient to measure the population’s true intent and that ranked choice voting does not ensure representation for small parties and favours larger parties, leading to a two-party dominated system. Other participants expressed concerns that ranked choice systems are confusing or exclusionary, lead to strategic voting, and hinder the representation of a plurality of voices in the Legislative Assembly.

OTHER REFORM PROPOSALS

In addition to input about specific electoral systems, the Committee received input about other related reforms. These included: adjusting the size and number of electoral districts; introducing a bicameral system; creating dedicated seats for party leaders based on a threshold of popular vote for a party; and creating dedicated seats for Indigenous peoples and other communities.

ELECTORAL REFORM PROCESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Process, Principles, and Values

Elections BC stated that if the province proceeds with electoral reform, comprehensive changes to the *Election Act* and its regulations would be required to update provisions related to voting, counting, and results reporting processes. The Office added that an Electoral Boundaries Commission would likely need to be appointed to propose new electoral districts, and subsequently, voters would need to be assigned to them through a redistribution process. Elections BC also noted that its processes and technology would require re-engineering, and many systems and processes would need to be changed including new guidance and materials to retrain staff to administer elections under a different electoral system.

The Committee heard from several participants regarding the process for electoral reform in BC. Dr. Wolfgang Linden from the University of British Columbia stated that the province should make two distinct decisions: first whether to adopt a PR system and then, if applicable, which type of PR to use. Springtide Collective for Democracy proposed a multi-step process which included stating the principles guiding the

work, delegating key aspects of the work to arm’s-length bodies, soliciting expert feedback on a preliminary proposal, and committing to a formal public review process. Regarding timing, one individual suggested establishing a transition timeline with adequate preparation and education, while Generation Squeeze recommended making progress on designing a new provincial electoral system over the next three years. Other participants emphasized the importance of undertaking a robust, deliberative process to determine the best electoral system for BC.

Committee Members heard that any electoral system should be accessible, transparent, and feel free and fair to support voter participation and public confidence in democratic outcomes. Many submissions drew the Committee’s attention to the importance of ensuring that electoral system reform guarantees that each person’s vote counts. In terms of diversity, several individuals identified the need to implement a voting system that allows a range of voices in the Legislative Assembly. CityHive Youth Engagement Society recommended assessing electoral systems based on how well they foster democratic values such as inclusion, equity, accessibility, representation, and responsiveness. Several participants also recommended adopting a voting system that allows more people to have their voices heard and ensures greater collaboration between parties. Other participants pointed to the importance of adopting clear guiding values such as voter choice, proportionality, stability, long-term viability, and local representation.

Consultation

With respect to public consultation, the Committee heard about the importance of undertaking broad engagement. Dr. Paula Waatainen from Vancouver Island University emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for community participation and providing accessible information on any electoral reform proposals to allow citizen-to-citizen discussions on proposed reforms. Another participant noted that transparent and inclusive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders are necessary to ensure legitimacy and public confidence in proposed reforms. In terms of youth stakeholders, one participant suggested establishing youth electoral reform task forces in each constituency to maintain ongoing dialogue between young people and decision-makers. CityHive Youth Engagement Society recommended re-engaging the public in a transparent, well-resourced exploration of

electoral reform options, including the PR models considered in the 2018 referendum.

The Committee also heard about the value of integrating consultation with experts into the electoral reform process. Equal Vote Coalition suggested that experts were not sufficiently consulted in previous referenda, and complex design trade-offs were not debated in depth. Several participants supported having experts study other jurisdictions which have successfully implemented alternative voting systems to determine how to implement a similar system in BC. Several participants, including Dr. Wiebe and the BC Green Party, recommended consulting or deferring to experts to determine options for electoral reform. Equal Vote Coalition emphasized the need to consult the expertise of researchers representing a diversity of positions to ensure that any proposed change is grounded in rigorous evidence. One individual highlighted that consultation should combine expert guidance with structured dialogue, allowing diverse groups to discuss options, express preferences, and contribute to informed decision-making. Several individuals added that meaningful discussions can be conducted by combining expert guidance, public input, and a diverse range of stakeholder engagement to create resolutions.

Citizens' Assembly

Members of the 2003 BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform were chosen at random from the voters list from each of the province's 79 electoral districts. One woman and one man were selected from each electoral district, with an additional Indigenous man and woman and the chair of the Assembly bringing the total number of participants to 161. Age was also considered when determining who would participate. The Citizens' Assembly completed its work in three phases: learning, public hearings, and deliberations before making its recommendations.

The Committee heard from approximately 40 participants who supported establishing another citizens' assembly on electoral reform. Participants stated that this process would provide non-partisan recommendations guided by expert views and community engagement. Dr. Stewart Prest from the University of British Columbia and several individuals highlighted that a citizens' assembly must be citizen-driven, with participants randomly selected from across the province to reflect its regional and demographic diversity. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, a District of Saanich councillor, stated that citizens' assemblies are a better and more effective way to encourage

meaningful discussions about selecting a new electoral system. Dr. Prest stated that all electoral reform options should be given thoughtful, inclusive consideration and that alternatives should be explored systematically through a deliberative process. Dr. Prest also noted that the assembly's final recommendation should be clear, singular, and easy for the public to understand.

In terms of more specific recommendations, the Committee heard about the desire to ensure that any future citizens' assembly's recommendations are binding. Some participants also recommended establishing a citizens' assembly to explore and select an alternative electoral system to be adopted for at least two elections, followed by a referendum to determine whether to keep the new system or return to FPTP.

Committee Members also heard from participants who opposed establishing another citizens' assembly on the topic of electoral reform. The No Proportional Representation BC Society argued that a citizens' assembly is unnecessary because Members of the Legislative Assembly already serve as the legitimate voice of British Columbians and are elected to make difficult decisions on behalf of their constituents. The Society also noted that citizens' assemblies can be vulnerable to inexperience and influenced by academic advisors and ideological views.

Referenda

Approximately 20 participants supported the use of a referendum as the process to move forward with electoral reform, with several highlighting the need to engage voters prior to making changes to the electoral system. The No Proportional Representation BC Society, emphasized the importance of referenda, noting that the electoral system should not be changed without voter consent. The Society added that voters should decide how politicians are elected to represent them, and that a new electoral system should not be imposed without voter approval to prevent political manipulation. The Hospital Employees' Union cited New Zealand's electoral reform process as an example to follow and suggested holding a two-step referendum process where voters would first be asked if they wish to end the FPTP system and subsequently be asked to select their preferred alternative electoral system among options developed during a deliberative consultation process. The Union suggested that the process should ideally be completed by November 30, 2026, to ensure Elections BC can implement a new electoral system in time for the 2028 provincial general election.

Many submissions drew the Committee's attention to characteristics they would like to see in a referendum should another occur. Participants emphasized the need for clear and simple questions, a lower threshold to enact change, and robust public education.

The Committee also received input from approximately 150 participants opposed to holding another referendum on electoral reform. Several participants indicated that there are precedents for conducting electoral reform without a referendum. Dr. Pilon highlighted that referenda have rarely been used to change voting systems, noting that amongst western countries only Switzerland and New Zealand have reformed their systems that way. Several participants pointed to historical precedents of Canadian electoral reform implemented without referenda, such as expanding the franchise, setting fixed election dates, and reforming campaign finance rules. One participant added that there is no constitutional convention requiring a referendum to change the electoral system.

Other participants opposed the use of referenda for electoral reform on the basis that it places the burden of decision-making on the public. One individual noted that although referenda are democratic processes, they leave all responsibilities and choices to the public instead of sharing them with elected representatives. Several participants also noted that giving voters so much responsibility is unrealistic as they cannot be expected to dedicate enough time to fully understand different electoral systems.

Committee Members also heard that referenda on electoral reform are not an appropriate method for considering issues that impact Canadians' civil rights. Springtide Collective for Democracy stated that referenda are not appropriate for settling civil rights questions, noting that historically referenda have been held to deny or prevent the advancement of civil rights issues. Fair Voting BC added that the rights of minorities should not be subject to processes that appear democratic but can be dominated or determined by majorities.

The Committee heard from participants raising concerns about the cost of referenda, the time involved, or potential redundancy. The No Proportional Representation BC Society discussed how electoral reform would result in significant costs and require the complete attention of Elections BC. Several participants suggested that holding another referendum on electoral reform is unnecessary as the question has already been resolved.

Approximately 70 participants indicated that previous referenda were too complicated or that the public was not provided with sufficient information. One individual noted that previous referenda were confusing, even for people with a general understanding of PR. VotingBC and Dr. Maxwell Cameron, University of British Columbia, added that public information campaigns in the lead up to previous referenda were insufficient, leaving voters unprepared. Several individuals highlighted that many voters do not have the time or motivation to do the research required to understand the merits and challenges of alternative systems, suggesting that when people lack an understanding of new options, they tend to avoid change.

Members also heard from approximately 60 participants who expressed concerns that referenda are vulnerable to misinformation. Fair Vote Canada emphasized that due to this vulnerability, referenda on electoral reform are an ineffective tool for informed decision-making.

With regards to change, approximately 30 participants including Fair Vote Canada suggested that referenda are susceptible to status quo bias. One individual added that when presented with multiple options, people feel more comfortable choosing the option that they already know. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, a District of Saanich councillor, stated that a challenge with electoral reform referenda is the asymmetric roles of actors involved, noting that those advocating for change must educate voters about the new system, whereas opponents of electoral reform only need to maintain the status quo.

Committee Members heard from participants who indicated that the thresholds for past referenda results to be binding on government were too high. Several participants noted that despite the province having overwhelmingly voted in favour of changing the electoral system in the 2005 referendum, reform was not implemented due to the high threshold. Another individual suggested that any referendum result above 50 percent should be a directive for change.

Multi-Party Agreements

Several participants advocated for the use of multi-party agreements to enact electoral reform, highlighting that it would allow for more collaborative politics. Other participants, including Fair Vote Canada, noted that multi-party consensus has been key to making progress on electoral reform in other countries. One participant indicated that 20 out of 22

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries that have adopted PR have done so through multi-party agreements.

Legislative Change

On the issue of legislative change, Dr. Pilon noted that in most jurisdictions, political parties committed to electoral reform have simply used legislative means to introduce new systems. Several participants agreed that it is the responsibility of elected officials to enact electoral reform via legislation, rather than the responsibility of the public to decide on reform via referenda. One individual stated that there is no legal requirement under the BC *Constitution Act* or *Election Act* to hold a public referendum on electoral reform while the BC Civil Liberties Association emphasized that elected representatives have a constitutional and democratic obligation to address electoral reform directly, rather than using a referendum. Approximately 21 participants recommended implementing electoral reform through legislative change.

Trial Period and Pilot Programs

Another process suggested by participants was implementing a new system for a set number of elections, with the option to revert to FPTP afterwards. Participants highlighted New Zealand as a country that used this method to move to PR. Participants argued that by piloting a new electoral system for two elections, voters would have the opportunity to experience and understand it and that holding a referendum after several elections would ensure increased participation. Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada and Member of Parliament for Saanich-Gulf Islands, emphasized that this process is necessary since the status quo has an advantage in referenda.

Public Education

Another key theme was the importance of coupling electoral reform with public education. Elections BC identified that an ongoing public education program for voters and political participants would be essential to ensure that any new electoral system is well understood and that public trust in the electoral process is maintained. The organization added that processes that are not well understood by voters are more vulnerable to disinformation and misinformation leading to a potential decline in voter trust. Several participants also highlighted the importance of providing accurate and neutral information about the options for electoral reform.

CityHive Youth Engagement Society, Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, and Dr. Waatainen recommended ensuring that any reform process includes robust and accessible education, plain-language materials, and culturally appropriate outreach, especially to communities that have historically faced barriers to participation. One individual also proposed developing accessible, multilingual educational materials explaining electoral systems' mechanics and implications while another suggested providing resources to secondary and post-secondary teachers to educate students about electoral reform. Participants further highlighted the need to ensure Elections BC is appropriately resourced to provide information on electoral reform, particularly if another referendum is held.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Committee also heard from participants, including Unlock Democracy and Kootenay Central Green, who advocated to allow local governments to adopt different voting systems. Participants emphasized the benefits of different voting systems for municipal elections, with Strong Towns Kelowna and the Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments advocating for ranked choice voting and BC ACORN supporting the ward system over citywide elections. Individuals and organizations also discussed whether local elections were the appropriate venue to test electoral reform prior to implementation at the provincial level, with some participants agreeing and some opposed. Concerns about transparency and accountability in local governance were also raised, with participants noting a lack of information about local government finances and a lack of recall mechanisms. In terms of public participation, individuals noted that local governments must broaden the base of democratic participation and Dr. Cameron emphasized that municipalities should be encouraged to experiment participatory innovations like participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, and community councils.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee reflected on the significant input it received regarding electoral reform with extensive discussion and debate about the current electoral system and the alternatives, the merits of changing the electoral system, and how electoral reform could unfold should BC proceed in that direction. Committee Members recognized that many participants who participated in the Committee's consultation advocated for a change.

At the same time, the Committee acknowledged that altering something as critical as the electoral system likely requires further conversations with British Columbians to ensure broad support for and public trust in any potential changes. Committee Members also recognized that electoral reform is not a panacea and that every system has flaws, noting that the electoral system is simply one element of BC's democratic ecosystem and that other systemic issues must also be addressed to alleviate concerns related to the health of BC's democracy.

Members determined that the process leading to electoral reform is as important as the outcome and discussed whether the Committee was the best forum for making such decisions. Committee Members explored the benefits of assigning this task to a body such as a citizens' or peoples' assembly with the time and latitude to conduct broader public consultation, consider submissions in a more structured and detailed way, and seek expert guidance. As such, Members supported the idea of a peoples' assembly that would examine and make recommendations on electoral systems. The Committee also agreed that a panel of experts should provide the peoples' assembly with advice and information.

In considering a potential mandate for a peoples' assembly, the Committee identified attributes that Members felt could be included in a terms of reference, emphasizing the importance of developing an open-ended terms of reference to enable a process of assessment and comparison of electoral systems that could lead to any outcome—whether retaining the current system or moving to a new one. This includes providing underlying principles and values which could be desirable for BC's electoral system, such as: increased proportionality between the popular vote of a party and party representation in the Legislature; equitable representation for rural and urban regions; accountable representation by individual MLAs chosen by voters; stable and effective government; increased voter engagement and participation; more collaboration between political parties; reduced polarization; and

government decision-making which considers the full range of policy options.

The Committee further agreed that the membership of a peoples' assembly should be broadly representative of BC's diverse population, including age, gender, gender diversity, income levels, ethnicity, First Nations ancestry, disability, and geographical distribution. Members also identified that a peoples' assembly would need to consult with the First Nations Leadership Council to develop an approach to ensure meaningful participation from First Nations. In conducting its work, Committee Members indicated that a peoples' assembly should rigorously assess and compare electoral systems, including by considering the risks associated with achieving desired outcomes and the experiences of other jurisdictions. Committee Members recognized the importance of ensuring that a peoples' assembly be provided with the resources and support required to carry out its mandate, including the ability to publicize its report to inform and educate the public of any recommendations. The Committee also observed that should a peoples' assembly recommend a change to the electoral system, it should be required to make recommendations regarding implementation and public education as well as provide a cost estimate. Members recognized that a panel of experts should be involved in further developing the terms of reference for a peoples' assembly. The terms of reference could outline the process, if changes to the electoral system are recommended, for consideration and implementation of the recommendations by government.

Regarding electoral reform at the municipal level, the Committee discussed whether to consider providing local governments with the opportunity to select an alternative voting system for their communities. While Members saw the value of considering electoral reform at the municipal level, they agreed that further consultation with local governments and other stakeholders was necessary to better gauge interest in such changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

35. Consider establishing a peoples' assembly to examine and make recommendations, in consultation with experts, on the model for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly.
36. Consult local governments to determine the level of interest in alternative electoral systems for municipal elections.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

1. Establish a non-partisan centre of excellence for democratic engagement, in collaboration with experts, to develop resources that support local engagement, public learning, and consultation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

2. Request that the federal government include letters addressed to Members of the Legislative Assembly in the Canada Post agreement where letters to Members of Parliament are delivered postage-free.
3. Enhance public consultation processes by:
 - a. ensuring proactive and early engagement with the public using diverse consultation methods, transparent and responsive communication, and timely release of results of consultations;
 - b. leveraging technology to create secure, accessible, and inclusive platforms for public input, deliberation, and direct public engagement initiatives;
 - c. empowering youth to help co-design engagement tools and messaging; and
 - d. creating a standing youth advisory body or roles within key provincial ministries, to provide input on legislation, programs, and budgets that affect youth.

INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

4. In collaboration with Elections BC and the federal government, review current legislative and regulatory measures to counter misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech during elections, including:
 - a. strengthening rules and enforcement;

- b. examining mechanisms for more timely removal of harmful content; and
 - c. strengthening the regulation of social media platforms while maintaining freedom of expression.

5. Establish a working group to propose amendments to the *Personal Information Protection Act* and *Election Act* to better address social media and emergent technologies, including artificial intelligence.
6. Strengthen protections and support for candidates and their family members experiencing harassment, abuse, and other forms of online harms.
7. Require digital platforms to:
 - a. act with a duty of care, establishing clear requirements to protect users and ensure their safety, including through data privacy, platform design, and content policy; and
 - b. provide information and evidence to an independent external auditor to determine the effectiveness of safety measures and identify new risks and mitigation strategies.
8. Join the Open Government Partnership.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

9. Ensure the Electoral Integrity Working Group identifies and addresses the concerns about foreign interference in all of its forms raised in the Committee's consultation.

CIVIC EDUCATION

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

10. Strengthen civic education in the K-12 school system, with input from resource development experts and an emphasis on applied learning.

11. Review, adapt, and incorporate best practices regarding media literacy, critical thinking, and misinformation education in BC schools.
12. Prioritize funding for pre-service and in-service civic education professional development for K-12 educators and support similar opportunities for post-secondary instructors.

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

13. Assign Elections BC formal responsibility for:
 - a. leading non-partisan education initiatives, including about the rights and responsibilities of civic participation; and
 - b. administering grants dedicated to non-partisan community civic engagement programs, delivered in multiple languages where numbers warrant.

VOTING

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

14. Assign Elections BC formal responsibility for increasing voter turnout.
15. Amend the *Election Act* to require proactive enumeration on an annual basis, with additional efforts specific to new housing projects, neighbourhoods with higher turnover, and First Nations communities in consultation with local leadership, and ensure Elections BC begins this work by a set deadline and reports publicly on its implementation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

16. Ensure that registered parties and candidates can access poll-by-poll results and information about when and where voters cast their ballot.
17. Prepare a public report identifying and evaluating the implications of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, by reviewing national and sub-national jurisdictions where this occurs.
18. Identify and implement improvements to the practices, process, and communications related to voter registration including exploring:
 - a. opportunities to further encourage youth registration; and

- b. the potential implementation of implementing automatic voter registration with an opt-out provision.

19. Review and improve access to and public awareness of voting opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of any changes after the next provincial general election.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

20. Examine the implications of extending voting rights to permanent residents in BC.
21. Require every post-secondary institution to work with Elections BC to develop a voter engagement plan that could include a staff lead on every campus and that integrates voter registration and civic engagement into student orientation.

CAMPAIGNING AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

22. Enable Elections BC to modernize and automate the process by which MLA candidate nominators are verified.
23. Require Elections BC to collect and share voters' email addresses and mobile phone numbers with registered political parties and candidates under strict privacy guidelines, and ensure Elections BC begins this work by a set deadline and reports publicly on its implementation.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

24. Work with the federal government to review regulations and enforcement related to digital communications from political parties.
25. Review the timeliness and efficacy of Elections BC's campaign finance enforcement powers to ensure they are sufficient.
26. Evaluate a ban on cryptocurrency donations until such a time as a more fulsome regulatory regime for cryptocurrency is in place.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Elections BC:

27. Examine the feasibility of developing a centralized, non-partisan resource to provide voters verifiable information about candidates.

28. Strengthen communication and enforcement related to access to multi-unit buildings for candidates and their campaigns, as established in the *Election Act*.

PARLIAMENT AND PARTIES

The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly:

29. Appoint a parliamentary committee to review the changes made to Private Members' Business to ensure they are effectively enabling Private Members to advance legislative initiatives.
30. Re-establish the Working Group on Parliamentary Culture to monitor the implementation of its previous recommendations as well as consider:
 - a. additional opportunities for collaboration between Members of different caucuses, in both formal legislative processes and outside;
 - b. improving the inclusivity and accessibility of parliamentary spaces.
31. Examine opportunities to increase the effective use of parliamentary committees to facilitate collaboration.
32. Strengthen the regulation and oversight of BC's political parties, including authorizing Elections BC to oversee the administration of the election of party leaders.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the Legislative Assembly Management Committee:

33. Review the sufficiency and equity of Members' remuneration and allowances, and the funding formula for caucuses and independent Members.

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

34. Evaluate amending the *Personal Information Protection Act* to require mandatory breach reporting, mandatory privacy impact assessments, and privacy management programs for political parties, as well as stronger oversight and penalization of parties' non-consensual collection of personal information.

ELECTORAL REFORM

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

35. Consider establishing a peoples' assembly to examine and make recommendations, in consultation with experts, on the model for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly.
36. Consult local governments to determine the level of interest in alternative electoral systems for municipal elections.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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