Submission to the Justice Committee on the Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Bill

# About us

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 95,000 members. We are a democratic organisation representing members in the public service, the wider public services, state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors. The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913.

The PSA’s Local Government Sector Committee is the democratically elected governance structure representing the PSA’s more than 10,000 members working in local government. Our members in local government have a strong interest in well-functioning local democracy and local public services.

Along with our own submission we tautoko the submissions of Te Rūnanga o Ngā Toa Āwhina and PSA Youth.

# Our position on the Bill

We strongly oppose this Bill.

The PSA supported the 2021 Local Electoral (Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Bill that repealed the mechanism that allowed for a plebiscite to overturn a council recommendation to establish a Māori ward. We are disappointed to see the current Government attempting to reverse what was a positive step forward in Māori representation in local government.

We know that to honour te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensure tino rangatiratanga for Māori and improve the lives of working Māori, Māori must have fair and adequate representation across all our governing bodies, including local government. Māori representation at a local level is a step towards affirming rights guaranteed to Māori as tangata whenua under te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Many councils have chosen to introduce Māori wards to better reflect the communities they govern through a direct decision of council under the current legislation. Although they may not have held referenda, council minutes will show these decisions were not taken lightly or without consideration of community views.

A referendum is not required for the creation of other wards such as rural or geographic wards, and creates an additional barrier unique to Māori representation.

In addition to voicing our opposition to the Bill, we want to voice our concern about the timeframes of this select committee process. The severely shortened submission period, and its effect in terms of limiting people’s ability to consider the legislation and make submissions, is not justified.