27 April 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Commitments for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018

The Harmony Alliance is one of six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to promote the views of all Australian women, to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

The Harmony Alliance's purpose is to provide a national inclusive and informed voice on the multiplicity of issues impacting on experiences and outcomes of migrant and refugee women, and to enable opportunities for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to directly engage in driving positive change.

The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee regarding the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Commitments for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018. We note the Committee's intent to consider submissions previously made to its inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017, and would like to endorse submissions and recommendations made to this inquiry by our peak body members, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils Australia, Migration Council Australia, the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia. In addition, we recommend that the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee:

- **Note** the disproportionate effect that the proposed Bill 2018 will have on women;
- **Note** the adverse impact that the current proposal to increase the general residence requirement for eligibility to apply for citizenship by conferral stands to have on the settlement and integration outcomes of migrants to Australia;
- **Note** that the Harmony Alliance does not agree with the use of an online survey for policy-making purposes;
- **Reject** the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018 in its current form.

Disproportionate effect on women
Proposals in this Bill to increase English language requirements to apply for citizenship from a "basic knowledge of English" to "competent English language proficiency" will unduly target female migrants. According to the Department of Social Services, women often delay learning English in order to assist their children or family settle into Australia.[1] In the *Building a New Life in Australia*

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[1] Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services [DSS}). *Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants – Findings from the first three waves* (Canberra, 2017). P25-28.

study, being female was found to be a significant factor associated with a lower likelihood of speaking English well or very well; mothers in particular were less likely to understand spoken English.[2]

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration also noted with concern in their recent report, *No one teaches you how to become an Australian,* that the current Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) does not sufficiently take into account competing priorities for newly arrived migrants – including some that disproportionately affect women, such as caring for family members.[3] Furthermore, some migrants have finished the AMEP without demonstrating adequate English proficiency.[4] Migrants should not be expected to prove competency in English without adequate support to reach these goals.

Furthermore, the proposal to require applicants for the conferral of citizenship to "demonstrate their integration into the Australian community, including by behaving in a manner consistent with…Australian values" is vague in its current form, and also risks disproportionately targeting women. By initially prioritising their family's settlement outcomes, women may take longer to demonstrate traditional signs of 'integration', while in no way embodying a lower level of commitment to settling in Australia. The focus of this bill should be shifted towards supporting new migrants to succeed, rather than on excluding those whose settlement pathways do not meet arbitrary benchmarks.

Detriments of delaying citizenship

Citizenship plays a key role in boosting the integration of new migrants. Key conditions for positive settlement outcomes include labour market integration, social inclusion, health, civic engagement and host society opinions of immigration.[5] Citizenship has been shown to be positively associated with better labour market outcomes, including employment rates, job profiles and wages, particularly for the most disadvantaged of migrants with the lowest chances of employment.[6] Conferring citizenship invites migrants to invest in their life in Australia, both socially and economically, and improves their engagement in public life. This engagement in public and economic life, increases migrants voice and visibility, which in turn boosts understanding of and positive attitudes towards immigration by the host nation – a virtuous cycle for better integration.[7] The alternative, if this bill is passed, risks creating protracted situations of second-class migrants, disenfranchised and with little incentive to invest in Australian society.

For more information or to discuss the contents of this submission further, please contact the Harmony Alliance Secretariat:
Ph: +61 (2) 6162 0361
Email: secretariat@harmonyalliance.org.au

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Joint Standing Committee on Migration. *No one teaches you how to become an Australian: report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes* (Canberra, 2017).

[4] Ibid.

[5] OECD/European Union. Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015). P 3.

[6] OECD. *Naturalisation: A Passport for the Better Integration of Immigrants?* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011). P47-50.

[7] Ibid.