

8th March 2018

Hon. Rob Lucas MLC
Shadow Treasurer
Parliament House
Adelaide South Australia 5000

Ross Womersley
Chief Executive Officer
SACOSS
47 King William Road
Unley SA 5061

Dear Mr  Womersley,

Thank you for your correspondence over the past few months in regards to your State Election 2018 priorities. On behalf of MP Steven Marshall I have provided the Liberal Party's responses as requested in your submission.

The Liberal Party of South Australia appreciates the opportunity to engage and respond on these matters.

Thank you again for your interest and correspondence.

Yours sincerely,


Rob Lucas

Shadow Treasurer

Introductory comments

Most South Australians interact on a voluntary or compulsory basis in the digital space. Interacting with government is becoming increasingly through digital platforms, such as my.gov (Medicare, Centrelink, the ATO), sa.gov.au, myagedcare, the NDIA etc.

Low-income telecommunication products often don't provide large data allowances, and the penalties for exceeding data limits can be highly punitive. Mobile data is the most expensive form of data (in comparison to home-based services), but is the only form accessed by 20% of Australians, particularly those on low incomes.

Given the Liberal Party's strong representation in rural and regional South Australia, we are well aware of the communications divide when compared to the CBD and metropolitan area. Extending services in regions will be one of our priorities.

State-wide digital inclusion plan

Given the Weatherill Government has failed to deliver its promised Innovation Strategy, a Marshall Liberal Government will develop a strategy for South Australia with a focus on digital inclusion.

A Marshall Liberal government will undertake a range of measures to extend digital capability for those who are most disadvantaged:

- Audit existing free Wi-Fi locations (such as community centres, council libraries, cafes, shopping centres, Adelaide's CBD) to determine geographic locations most in need;
- Explore implementing services at new regional and suburban hubs as places where local people can be engaged in other opportunities. Potential sites may include community centres, libraries, sporting grounds as well as new regional DV hubs;
- Ensuring that South Australian government websites meet Universal Design guidelines so that they are fully accessible to people with disabilities;
- Approach the federal government for funding assistance to fill gaps;
- Evaluate the existing free transport Wi-Fi plan (including any concerns about data privacy) prior to extending to other locations;
- Explore best practice ways to educate about online safety, including through the Go Digi network (<https://www.godigi.org.au/about>); and
- Lobby the federal government to ensure that telecommunications regulations require that retailers can't gouge the consumers who can least afford to pay penalties.

Access to government websites unmetered data

The Liberal Party supports the principle of free access to South Australian Government websites however from opposition we are unable to estimate the cost of such a commitment. A Marshall Liberal Government will actively consider options to implement the policy.

Funding for increased SA regional data in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index

The Liberal Party's Digital Strategy will monitor digital access, download speeds and free Wi-Fi access across South Australia to determine which areas are in need of prioritisation. This information will be publicly available.

Funding an audit of digital technology usage and literacy to build digital capacity in the community services sector

If elected to government, the Liberal Party will consider this request for funding in the consideration of the next Budget.

Providing online tertiary education programs for prisoners to facilitate rehabilitation, digital inclusion and post-release life chances.

The Liberal Party is committed to improving educational opportunities within prisons. Much of the evidence provided to the select committee into the administration of South Australia's prisons showed that there are still gaps in educational opportunities for prisoners. The Liberal party is also open to increasing the use of online resources where community safety is not compromised.

Providing and offline service guarantee that all government policies and services will remain easily accessible with no disadvantage to those who are not digitally connected.

The Marshall Liberal Government is focused on a transition to a digital future but recognises that the transition needs to be managed such that people who are without internet access can still participate in government services.

We cannot make a jump to a digital future without taking people on the journey and recognising the barriers people face when dealing with online services.

SACOSS cost of living survey response

ENERGY

The Weatherill Government's failure to maintain affordable and reliable electricity continues to cost families dearly.

With the most expensive electricity in the National Electricity Market, South Australia has the greatest level of household hardship.

Jurisdiction	Disconnections (% of customers)	Outstanding debt (% of customers)	Debt levels (\$ average customer)	Hardship repayment plans (% of customers)
SA	1.43	4.7	901	1.5
NSW	0.89	2.9	653	0.83
ACT	0.25	3.7	776	0.39
Qld	1.3	2.3	580	1.02
Tasmania	0.43	1.5	756	0.93

Source: Australian Energy Regulator Annual Report (2016/17) on Retail Energy Market

In South Australia market prices for a typical residential consumer leapt by 17% in 2016/17 (and this was on top of an average 10% increase in July 2016).

The State Liberals' Plan

If elected in March 2018, a Marshall Liberal Government will implement a comprehensive solution to provide all South Australians with an electricity system that is:

- Affordable
- Reliable
- Secure

Our full policy is at: liberalenergysolution.com.au

Key components of our policy have been independently modelled. Our policy will produce a saving of \$302 on the annual average household electricity bill.

Our policy also recognises that more needs to be done to inform consumers about the options available to them, so that they can obtain the best deal possible.

Accordingly, a Marshall Liberal Government will:

- Ban exit fees on retail contracts so customer have the power to make choices; and
- Enforce minimum notice periods before retailers can increase prices to existing standard and market offers.

A Marshall Liberal Government will also invest \$100 million in a Household Storage Subsidy Scheme.

This will provide a means-tested grant averaging \$2,500 to facilitate the installation of batteries in 40,000 homes.

It will be available to households that have solar PV systems installed and means-testing will enable low-income households to access the scheme. Even household without solar PV

systems or batteries will benefit from the lower prices which will flow through to all customers via our policies.

Energy Concessions

The Liberal Party appreciates that SACOSS has consistently advocated for changes to the verification of energy concessions.

The South Australian Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) verifies eligibility for energy concessions in South Australia, while in other jurisdictions this is undertaken by energy retailers.

The DCSI administration of concessions has been so inept that many people who struggle the most to pay their power bills have suffered unnecessary disruptions in the payments.

In the interests of ensuring timely and efficient payment of the energy concession, a Marshall Liberal Government will transfer its administration to energy retailers who should not send a bill without the concession applied.

Targeting concessions to assist those most in need

SACOSS' *Utilities Cost of Living Policies* has also raised a number of issues about the targeting of energy concessions so they assist those in most need.

A Marshall Liberal Government will actively engage in further discussion with SACOSS and other stakeholders about the following proposals based on analysis and advice from relevant government agencies:

- Shifting concessions from a flat rate to a percentage of the bill;
- Providing a concession on land tax for landlords who invest in energy efficiencies that help tenants contain their energy bills; and
- Including consumers whose income is below the minimum wage in the priority group for free home energy audits under the Retailer Energy Efficiency Scheme (REES).

A Marshall Liberal government will also require that the REES schemes be bench-marked as a means to deliver quality. This will improve transparency regarding schemes which deliver better outcomes for consumers and the retailers providing them.

WATER

South Australians continue to pay too much for water, with the State Labor Government continuing to gouge hundreds of millions of dollars from South Australian families and businesses every year through SA Water. Average household water bills have risen from \$236 in 2001-02 to an estimated \$786 in 2016-17 – an increase of \$550, or 233%.

The State Liberals are committed to providing relief to South Australians paying too much for water. A Marshall Liberal Government will deliver an independent inquiry to uncover the issues with water pricing to deliver fair and efficient water prices for South Australian families and businesses.

Requiring landlords to pay water supply charge

From the Liberal Party's consultation with stakeholders, any changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act* have had minimal practical impact on whether tenants or landlords pay SA Water supply charges, as charges were likely to be included as an overhead in the weekly

rental cost. A Marshall Liberal government will commit to ensuring that any such charges are transparent during the advertising process prior to the signing of rental agreements.

Support for water customers at risk of restriction of water supply

As South Australia's water prices have sky-rocketed to become the most expensive in Australia, more and more customers are having difficulty paying their bills and relying on hardship programs.

A Marshall Liberal Government agrees to SACOSS' request that the Minister for Water refers the question of the introduction of a mandatory hardship-related GSL for South Australian water businesses to ESCOSA for investigation and advice pursuant to section 5(f) of the Essential Services Commission Act 2002 (ESC Act).

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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A Marshall Liberal government will undertake a range of measures to extend digital capability for those who are most disadvantaged:

- Audit existing free Wi-Fi locations (such as community centres, council libraries, cafes, shopping centres, Adelaide's CBD) to determine geographic locations most in need;
- Explore the cost to implement for community centres and libraries as well as new regional DV hubs;
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SACOSS

Justice

Replace the current flat-rate traffic and summary fines with ones based on a proportion of the offenders' income

Speed cameras serve an important part of our road infrastructure, in complementing Police roles for community safety.

The Liberal Party have already announced a thorough audit of speed cameras in South Australia to ensure these devices are not used to raise revenue, but rather used to promote and ensure road safety.

It is vital we recalibrate the focus of speed cameras for community safety needs.

We understand the way fines and other bills add to cost of living pressures. To combat this the Liberal Party have also announced we will cap council rates, reduce the Emergency Services Levy, whilst also encouraging small business to employ more locals through removing payroll tax for some businesses.

A Marshall Liberal Government will not be introducing a fines system based on a proportion of an offender's income.

Children and Families

For too long Labor have failed our children and their families by focusing on the acute cases where a child must be removed often after years of chronic neglect leading to a lifetime of complex behavioural issues.

A Liberal government will focus on prevention and early intervention to stem the ever increasing flow of children coming into care. We will approach this with a whole of community and whole of government response.

We will change the legislation to require acting in "the best interests of the child" as opposed to "safety" which is the very low base set by this Labor government. We will also bring children removed from their families back to the guardianship of the Minister and not the CEO. We believe governments should be ultimately responsible not their staff, as envisaged by the Westminster system of government.

Legislative reform to ensure early intervention into children's best interests and addressing gaps in Young People and Safety Act

Early intervention for vulnerable children should be a priority of any Government.

In 2017, we saw the passing of the Children's Protection (Safety) Bill, which failed to implement all of Margaret Nyland's recommendations, nor dealt with any early intervention strategy or needs.

Subsequently, the Government introduced a piece of legislation designed to placate stakeholders and those concerned about early intervention and prevention. This Bill was holistic in nature and provided no real strategy for change, with stakeholders not being properly consulted either.

The Liberal Party understands a strong early intervention strategy is needed in this space, and realise to draft this legislation appropriate consultation must occur with stakeholders and those on the front line of child protection.

The Weatherill Government's failure to adopt successful early intervention strategies has seen the number of vulnerable children taken into commercial care skyrocket, and this must not continue.

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children

There remains a disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children in child protection services.

If elected in March 2018, a Marshall Liberal Government will appoint an Assistant Commissioner for Aboriginal Children. This position will be established under the office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People – an office the Liberal's fought to establish for a decade following the Mullighan enquiry.

The Assistant Commissioner will focus on assisting Aboriginal families and communities to keep children safe in culturally appropriate ways, whilst developing policies and practices to promote the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal Children.

This appointment will be formally legislated for by amending the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act.

Support for young people in out of home care until 21 years old

Like SACOSS, the Liberal Party of SA strongly believe in extending foster care and kinship payments for young people to the age of 21.

If elected this March, we have already committed to extending these payments beyond the age of 18 to ensure some of the most vulnerable people in our community are provided extra support. This policy allows young people to continue to remain in foster care placements by ensuring reimbursements are paid to carers.

The whole community benefits when our young people are safe and in secure environments. We want to ensure that young people who have suffered a hard start in life are able to get on their feet as they approach adulthood.

We have listened to the caregivers and stakeholders on this important issue, which is why we are committed to implementing it if elected in 2018.

Gambling

Whilst the original vote to introduce gaming machines into SA was a conscience vote for Liberal MPs they are now a fact of life and the Liberal Party do not support any proposal to ban their continued operation in SA. Many hotel businesses in SA have made very significant financial investments and created many jobs over recent years and any proposal to ban gaming machines would threaten jobs and the viability of some of these businesses.

Facts show that growth in gambling in recent years has been linked to online gambling rather than with gaming machines. Tackling problem gambling will require initiatives in this area.

The State Liberals acknowledge that for a small number of gamblers they have very significant gambling problems and require targeted assistance. We will continue, review and

expand existing programmes that seek to reduce the number of problem gamblers and assist those who have a gambling problem.

Last year the maximum betting limit for gaming machines was halved from \$10 to \$5 in an attempt to reduce problem gambling. This change meant clubs and hotels in some cases had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in replacing old machines. When attempts were made in Parliament to reduce the maximum betting limit even further to \$1 both the Labor Party and Liberal Party opposed this move because the reduction to \$5 was only going to commence operation from 1 January 2017. Both parties agreed time was needed to monitor the impact of this major change.

The Liberal Party understands there is a need to get the balance right between minimizing the problems confronted by a small number of gamblers and ensuring the interests of businesses that have legal gambling options.

SACOSS Sector Support Policies

Funding and Contracting

Commit to continuation of the agreed principles for funding of the NFP sector

The Liberal Party understands that much progress has been made with Treasury officials towards a set of agreed funding principles, culminating in *DPC Circular 044* (1 July 2017). A Marshall Liberal government would welcome the implementation of these principles as well as ongoing discussions with the community services sector regarding any necessary modifications.

Commit to continue the Standard Indexation Policy as adopted by Cabinet in 2017

The SANFRAG process has led to an agreement from the South Australian government that indexation will be passed on to all non-government organisations. The Liberal Party has already agreed to continue this policy if elected in March 2018.

Finalise negotiations, adopt and implement the standard Funded Services Agreement and Grants Agreement templates

We appreciate that this element of the SANFRAG process has made considerable progress and that work needs to continue. A Marshall Liberal Government commits to continue these discussions, in the interests of providing practical outcomes, including reducing red tape for the non-government sector.

Extend the provisions of the *Late Payment of Government Debt (Interest) 2013 Act* to all not-for-profit organisations

A Marshall Liberal Government will commit to consulting further with SACOSS and other stakeholders about the possibility of making this Legislative change.

Other Sector Support

Funding for an audit of digital technology usage and literacy and to build digital capacity in the community services sector in SA

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SACOSS - HEALTH RESPONSE

1. Establish and resource a Connected Health for All Strategy

A Marshall Liberal Government will develop a strategy for health within the first year, with a number of plans linking to it.

The Liberal Party recognises the significant impact of the social determinants of health and appreciates that any health strategy needs to link to health-related policies in other portfolios.

Unlike the Weatherill Government's Transforming Health reforms which focused on metropolitan public hospitals, our strategy will be broad taking in areas such as preventive health, chronic disease management, and mental health, as well as clinical governance and workforce planning.

2. Create a discrete full-time role of Chief Public Health Officer, separate from that of the Chief Medical Officer

If elected in March, a Marshall Liberal Government will establish a stand-alone Chief Public Health Officer role, separate from that of the Chief Medical Officer.

This commitment is outlined in our [Better Prevention for a Healthy South Australia](#) policy, released in June 2017.

In addition, the policy lays out a Marshall Liberal Government's commitment to establish *Wellbeing SA* as a Prevention, Health Promotion and Primary Health Care agency, within SA Health. Separate from hospitals and health services, *Wellbeing SA* will be able to advocate for and broker services in public health and health promotion. It will undertake a health promotion function and focus on preventing health issues before they arise.

3. Establish (and construct a long term evaluation of) two non-government Comprehensive Primary Health Care Centres (CPHCCs) in South Australia

The Liberal Party recognises the importance and value of providing South Australians with greater and more timely access to community and primary health services and the important role that non-government organisations can play in achieving that goal. Our commitment to invest in [preventative health](#) – including our aim to pursue [targeted interventions](#) – reflect our commitment to integrating care.

We are not in a position to commit to establishing two Comprehensive Primary Care Centres. We would want to consult more broadly on such a significant investment.

4. Prioritise mental health by resourcing and fully implementing the SA Mental Health Strategic Plan, with a continuing role for the SA Mental Health Commission in leading the plan and reporting on progress

If elected, a Marshall Liberal Government will develop and fund a Mental Health Services Plan within 12-months of the election. Our services plan will do two key things. First, it will convert the vision of the SA Mental Health Strategic Plan into a detailed plan to develop

services to deliver tangible outcomes. Second, it will manage the transition to NDIS in a way which ensures that people don't fall through the gaps.

A Marshall Liberal Government will maintain an important role for the SA Mental Health Commissioner in the development and delivery of mental health services in this State.

Strengthening South Australia's mental health services will be a high priority for an incoming Marshall Liberal Government. To that end, we have committed \$4 million for a [paediatric eating disorder service](#) and \$10 million for a [Borderline Personality Disorder program](#).

Since the release of Chief Psychiatrist's report into Oakden, there has been a dramatic reduction in suitable long-term accommodation for older South Australians with severe dementia and other mental health issues. As part of our commitment to retain the [Repat site as a health precinct](#), a Marshall Liberal Government would look to utilise the former Ward 18 on that site as accommodation for this group of extremely vulnerable South Australians.

SACOSS Health, Housing and Justice Policies

HOUSING

Public Housing

The South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT or Housing SA) was a creature of Liberal Premier, Sir Thomas Playford. From a peak of over 60,000 homes, Labor has eroded the number of properties to less than 40,000. The public housing assets which were created in the Playford era have been progressively sold to pay for operational expenses.

South Australia does not have a rigorous strategic plan for how best to utilise our social housing, and no proper assessment of what our community's housing needs are has been undertaken. The 2017 Auditor-General's report states that the SAHT has not conducted an audit of its properties since 2003 (it was to undertake one by December 2017). This is grossly negligent.

Much of our social housing stock is in need of updating, both in terms of modernising homes as well as community development. Much of the current stock is not configured to suit today's tenants, contributing to higher vacancy rates. Labor has used high vacancy rates to justify selling off properties, with another 660 to be sold off in 17-18.

As our state's economy has continued to falter under Labor, more people are experiencing cost of living pressures due to precarious or lost employment in combination with the highest electricity prices in the world and the highest water charges in Australia. Social housing exists to provide a safety net for those who need it, but waiting lists are growing.

The new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) bilateral between the Commonwealth and South Australia will include targets for the full spectrum of housing options, including affordable housing and social housing. This is likely to prevent the further wholesale sale of public housing assets.

In our recently released "First 100 days document", we have committed to:

- Initiate full conditions assessment of Housing SA properties to support a strategic asset management plan (within the first 30 days of government)
- Establish parameters of a new housing authority amalgamating the functions of Housing SA and Renewal SA
- Engage the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute to audit the State's current housing assets and map future demand

A Marshall Liberal Government will consult further with all stakeholders about Aboriginal housing strategy including home ownership (Nunga loans), affordable housing and social housing.

The Liberal Party recognises that our public housing assets have been chronically neglected and will need to be rebuilt over time. We are pleased that community housing providers will be able to increase their stock under transfer by 30% and to modify the mix of dwellings to improve "place-making".

It is the Liberal Party's intention to create the conditions for a robust social and public housing sector. There are a number of properties which are currently underutilised. Furthermore, filling the gaps will require redevelopment through better utilisation of SAHT's assets and working in partnership with non-government providers and the federal government. More contemporary approaches to social housing through redevelopment will have regard to "place making", mixed housing and community integration. The experience

for SAHT tenants also needs to be greatly improved by providing an effective contact reference system, engaging tenants as peer advocates and providing tenancy representation.

In recognition of the need for additional properties in the affordable rental and affordable purchase markets, a Marshall Liberal government is committed to providing targeted tenancy support for PRAP clients, reviewing the disincentives to the participation by the private rental market with PRAP clients and examining additional shared equity, rent-to-buy and land lease schemes. We are also keen to engage with CapitalAsset for applications within government policy.

SACOSS Tax and Expenditure Policies

The Liberal Party will outline prior to election day what general policies it will implement to fund any election promises it makes.

The Weatherill Labor Government's current budget includes significant savings tasks without detailing exactly what health and community services they propose to cut over the next three years.

