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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Parliamentarians presented with plan to clean up politics before March election

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Outlawing misleading political advertising, strengthening lobbying laws and ensuring all students learn about democracy are part of a plan to be presented to NSW Parliamentarians today.

Democracy Counts, an alliance of more than 65 organisations, will hold a briefing for Parliamentarians on Thursday morning, co-hosted by Speaker and independent MP Greg Piper, Labor MP Jo Haylen and Liberal MP Monica Tudehope.

Democracy Counts Executive Director Tom Mooney said democracy was at a critical juncture in Australia and the upcoming NSW election presented an opportunity to safeguard it.

“Australia’s democracy is stronger than most, but Australians’ trust in their elected representatives is eroding,” Mr Mooney said.

“We’re calling for common-sense reforms that put the public interest first, including outlawing misleading political advertising, strengthening laws for lobbyists and ensuring all high school students have a chance to learn about our democracy.”

Democracy Counts welcomes the recent move by the NSW Government to ban the use of misleading AI deepfakes in political advertising.

“New South Wales is heading into an election at a time when voters have more information than ever at their fingertips, but it is harder than ever to know what’s trustworthy,” Mr Mooney said.

“We commend the NSW Government for banning AI deepfakes in political ads during election periods, and the next step must be to listen to the more than 31,000 NSW residents who have petitioned for broader truth-in-political-advertising laws to make it illegal to mislead voters.”

“Those who sell cars or toothpaste or insurance aren't allowed make ads that lie about what their product can do. People running for public office should be no different.”
A group of primary school student journalists will have the chance to ask questions at the event as part of the School News Project.

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Mr Mooney said it was programs like the School News Project – which teach school students about democracy and the media – that needed to be scaled up to reach all students.

“Currently, NSW is one of the only states that doesn’t have a mandatory civics and citizenship subject or dedicated syllabus at the high school level,” Mr Mooney said.

“That’s a problem because we have young people voting for the first time in March who may not feel equipped with an understanding of things like preferential voting. The same goes for some adult voters too.

“Civics and citizenship education, including media and digital literacy, must be prioritised by governments as part of a broader commitment to strengthening democracy.”

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About Democracy Counts

Democracy Counts is an alliance of organisations and Australians who care about the way democracy functions in Australia. We are calling for common sense reforms to protect our democracy: better civics education, investment in public interest journalism, political donation reform, ending the revolving door between lobbying and politics, and making online platforms better for citizens.

The growing alliance of more than 65 organisations includes the Centre for Public Integrity, Digital Rights Watch, the Local and Independent News Association, and the Alliance for Journalists’ Freedom. Democracy Counts is powered by McKinnon, an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to better governments for a stronger Australia.