

Greens, Libs hold back posters Bill

By The Canberra Times

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The ACT Government's proposed increase to penalties for putting up illegal bill posters will be watered down after the Greens and Liberals refused to endorse the changes yesterday. Under Chief Minister Jon Stanhope's proposed amendment, event organisers who illegally put up posters advertising concerts or other events would face fines of up to \$50,000 for companies, and \$10,000 for individuals. Police and city rangers would also be empowered to issue on-the-spot \$200 fines. In the Legislative Assembly yesterday, the Greens and Opposition expressed serious concerns about the Government's Bill, which would target not only posters but also chalk drawings, lost pet notices and community announcements not placed in designated areas, which were scarce. They voted to have the Bill referred to the

Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services to consider the issues. A Human Rights Act compatibility review the first time a detailed compatibility test has been made publicly available identified areas of potential conflict with the Government's Bill. In particular, the human rights section of the Department of Justice and Community Safety found the Bill could be inconsistent with a person's right to free speech, and on a person's right to a presumption of innocence, noting, "If the offence ... prevents people from affixing or attaching posters or pamphlets to public property in the exercise of their right to freedom of expression beyond that which is reasonable or proportionate, it will be inconsistent with the [Act]."

Opposition spokesman on territory and municipal services Alistair Coe said the changes could impinge on a person's right to free speech, and was too broad. "It is poorly drafted, vague legislation that will do nothing to enforce laws that are already in the statute book," Mr Coe said. Greens MLA Caroline Le Couteur said the Bill, which targeted event promoters who commissioned the posters even if they did not put up the posters themselves, disproportionately punished people. "We believe this Bill must be amended to achieve a stated purpose without disproportionately impacting on the rights of ACT citizens and or the vitality and culture of our city," she said. Meanwhile, another Government Bill that proposed to increase the penalties for illegal dumpers was passed. Victor Violante