



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS STATEMENT

20 July 2022

NAMFREL Calls for the Holding of the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections on December 5, 2022 As Scheduled

NAMFREL urges Congress to let the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE) proceed, as scheduled under Republic Act No. (R.A.) 11462, on 5 December 2022. The Constitution allows the legislature to determine the term of elective barangay officials through legislation: "The term of office of elective local officials, except barangay officials, which shall be determined by law." However, this does not mean that Congress should again postpone the BSKE. Notably, the law rescheduling the BSKE to 5 December 2022 only amends but does not repeal the requirement under R.A. 9164 that synchronized BSKEs be held in October every three years.

The barangay serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of government policies, plans, programs, projects, and activities in the community, as a forum wherein the collective views of the people may be expressed, crystallized and considered, and where disputes may be amicably settled. As the level of government closest to the people, each voter should be given regularly and without interruption the right to choose the leaders they see and interact with on a daily basis.

The implementation of national projects and programs, institutional memories of barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials, and efforts to recover from the pandemic and address our economic woes would be strengthened by a renewed mandate for the punong barangay (barangay chairman/captain) and the members of the sangguniang barangay (barangay kagawad).

R.A. 9164 states that the term of elective barangay officials shall only be for three years. This three-year duration remains unchanged. The term of SK officials is also only three years under the SK Law, as amended. However, the term of the incumbents elected in 2018 have exceeded three years.

Meanwhile, R.A. 11768, enacted in May 2022, introduces additional SK reforms, such as giving it the power to formulate and approve its internal rules and procedures, to appoint its secretary and treasurer subject to additional requirements, and to set the schedule of regular SK meetings and Katipunan ng Kabataan assemblies; exempting SK officials from the National Service Training Program; granting monthly honorarium to SK members and appropriate civil service eligibility; and allowing the SK to set aside an amount of its funds for its mandatory and continuing training. These reforms should be accompanied by a fresh mandate through elections of the SK chair and members.

SK elections are rendered timely by the fact that the current SK chair and members may already be more than 24 years old. The time is ripe for them to yield power to the youth of their barangays. R.A. 11768 affirms the requirement that SK officials must be "at least eighteen (18) years but not more than twenty-four (24) years of age on the day of the elections".

As to the matter of savings, the voice of the people is priceless. It can never be reduced to monetary terms. In addition, spending has already begun for the BSKE, particularly for procurement of supplies, forms, and paraphernalia, which NAMFREL has been monitoring.

Given these points, NAMFREL calls for the holding of the BSKE on 5 December 2022, as scheduled. The will of the people, as expressed through the ballot, is the very essence of democracy. This should not be set aside again.

NAMFREL is the first citizens-led, national election monitoring organization in the world. Since 1983, it has been accredited by the COMELEC as its citizens' arm. For the 2022 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections, NAMFREL has been observing voter registration activities, as well as providing information for first-time voter applicants, transferees, and applicants for reactivation through social media and NAMFREL's open data platform, <https://voteforus.org.ph>
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