



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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POSITION PAPER August 8, 2022

Young NAMFREL Members on the 2022 BSKE

We, young NAMFREL members, urge Congress to allow the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE) to push through on December 5, 2022.

In a democratic state such as the Philippines, the will of the people should always be heeded in the way they are governed. Based on Article II, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution, "sovereignty resides with the people and all government authority emanates from them." People's participation is first and foremost made through transparent, competitive, inclusive, orderly, free, and fair elections. We believe that electing new leaders is necessary in a democratic country such as ours not only to express our choice, but also as a check and balance to our government.

A legitimate government is required to ensure long-term economic development, peace, justice and the rule of law. Legitimacy is gained also through elections held regularly and with the characteristics mentioned above.

Therefore, the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE) must take place as scheduled on December 5, 2022. The people surely want their voice to be heard, as may be seen with the number of new registrants (1,913,386) surpassing COMELEC's original target of 500,000.

The recent Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) reforms have emboldened us and our fellow young people to increase our engagement and participation in governance, especially at the local level. Given that the last elections were held in 2018, hearing and heeding our choice, especially for us first-time SK voters, is overdue.

Furthermore, electing a new set of SK leaders will pave the way for potential modification or improvement of, or even entirely new youth programs under a new youth development plan. It is high time for us to elect those passionate in governance and in serving the public, who have new and innovative ideas drawn from our experiences in surviving the horrors of the COVID 19 pandemic.

While some lawmakers offered their rationale in postponing the 2022 BSKE, e.g. tapping the allocated budget for elections to COVID-19 response and to not cause further divisiveness after the recent national elections, there are equally important reasons for holding the elections. Republic Act (R.A.) 9164 provides that synchronized *barangay and sangguniang kabataan elections* shall be held every three (3) years, which also serves as the length of the term of office of barangay and SK officials. Three years are enough for the electorate to judge whether the incumbent officials performed their mandate. It is the voters' decision to either retain or replace the officials in power. Therefore, postponing the 2022 BSKE will deprive the electorate of this opportunity. This in turn disrupts the essence of democracy.

Another postponement of the 2022 BSKE will show that the national government shows little to no significance with regard to the youth's political participation. We young people will again be deprived of the platform to voice out our opinions, a chance to take up space in our community, and most importantly, the opportunity to hone our skills as the succeeding pillars and foundation of our society.

Throughout the years, the SK has been embedded in a mentor-mentee system, which has allowed the older generation to pass on their immeasurable knowledge and wisdom to the youth. This cannot be learned through books alone. It is time to allow a new set of young leaders, who have been bound to the walls of their home, to step out, learn from their elders, while also allowing the youth to put their ideas into practice.

The BSKE would allow young voters like us to learn about and realize our crucial role in local communities, and in turn increase our appetite for good governance. Once our fellow youth realize how involvement translates to power, our chosen leaders in turn would realize that they would always be accountable. To deprive us young voters of our opportunity to choose and to serve extinguishes our flaming desire to be involved and to play our role in our communities.

Postponing yet again this year's BSKE election would push us away from participating in the level of government that is closest to us. Meanwhile, allowing the BSKE to proceed would show that the national leadership prioritizes both national and local development helmed by leaders with a fresh mandate. Community leaders must have authority and legitimacy to devise and carry out policies and programs. These are what us, the youth, and the nation, deserve. ###

This position paper was written by members of NAMFREL from the youth that consist of volunteers, interns, and staff members, many of whom were first-time voters in the 2022 national and local elections. This paper has been submitted to both the Senate Committee on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation and the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms.