



NAMFREL

+63 8470 4151 • +63 8451 1586
namfrelsecretariat@namfrel.org.ph
www.namfrel.org.ph

National Citizens' Movement For Free Elections
Unit 601, DMG Center, Domingo M. Guevara St.,
Brgy. Mauway, Mandaluyong City, Philippines, 1550

NAMFREL MEDIA RELEASE **November 25, 2025**

NAMFREL submits recommendations to Congress on the issues of nuisance candidates and early voting

In a position paper submitted to the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms on November 24, 2025, the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) strongly recommends adding provisions to current bills filed that would address the practice of filing a certificate of candidacy (COC) to serve as a placeholder for a person who later files a COC via substitution at the last possible moment. According to NAMFREL, this practice makes a mockery of the electoral process, circumvents the spirit and purpose of candidate filing deadlines, allows late entrants to avoid scrutiny during the normal campaign period, and generates publicity through the drama of "beyond-the-last-minute filing." According to NAMFREL, *"the COC substitution mechanism serves a legitimate purpose—allowing parties to replace candidates who die, become disqualified, or voluntarily withdraw for valid reasons. However, this mechanism has been systematically abused to circumvent filing deadlines and create artificial drama that favors candidates with greater resources and media access."*

NAMFREL added that the bills filed before Congress on this matter should state that any person found by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to have filed a COC with the intent to serve as a placeholder for a substitute candidate, or who filed a COC without bona fide intention to pursue the candidacy and subsequently withdrew to allow substitution, shall be deemed to have committed an election offense. Similarly, any person who becomes a substitute candidate under circumstances demonstrating that the original COC was filed as a placeholder for the substitute, shall likewise be deemed to have committed an election offense.

On the issue of so-called "nuisance candidates," NAMFREL said in its position paper that the fact that a candidate is unaffiliated with any political party, or is not well-known to the general public, or is perceived as an 'unknown' candidate, should not be considered as evidence of lack of bona fide intention to run for office. *"Democracy requires openness to new voices and independent candidates. Many legitimate candidates begin their political careers as unknowns without party backing. To allow 'unknown' status to be grounds for nuisance candidacy would entrench political dynasties and party establishments while excluding newcomers and reformers."*



In the matter of early voting, NAMFREL recommends expanded coverage of qualified early voters, which will include: a) Election officials and workers rendering election duty; b) Citizens required to work on Election Day; c) Persons confined in hospitals and penitentiaries; and d) Indigenous peoples living in remote areas. According to NAMFREL, *"the principle underlying early voting is that no qualified voter should be denied their constitutional right to suffrage due to circumstances beyond their control. The categories listed above represent significant populations who face genuine barriers to voting. Their exclusion from early voting provisions would perpetuate their disenfranchisement."*

NAMFREL also recommends that registration for early voting should be accomplished through a simple, accessible online system that does not require voters to appear in person at COMELEC offices. *"If the purpose of early voting is to accommodate voters who face barriers to Election Day participation, it is counterproductive to require them to overcome significant barriers simply to register for early voting."*

NAMFREL's position paper was submitted to Congress for its initial deliberations on proposed measures on nuisance candidates and early voting. You may read NAMFREL's full set of recommendations here: <https://bit.ly/4pqnlDb>.

Earlier this month, on November 10, NAMFREL submitted to the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms its recommendations for an electoral reform legislation agenda for the 20th Congress, proposing twelve priority legislative measures. You may read the November 10 position paper here: <https://bit.ly/3JqE3Ks>.

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