



## **NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)**

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### **Position paper on Senate Bill No. 2972 authored by Senator Richard Gordon**

#### **“An Act Allowing Early Voting in National Elections, Amending for this Purpose Batas Pambansa Blg. 881, Otherwise Known as the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines”**

**by the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel)  
25 January 2010**

Early voting promotes enfranchisement by allowing voters, especially those who perform work on election day outside of their voting precincts, to cast their votes. Members of the military and police, media, election observers are the usual beneficiaries of this process. Countries like the U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, New Zealand, Thailand, and many other countries have early voting systems in place for voters outside their place of registration on election day and incapacitated voters.

The early voting process is not a new feature in the Philippine elections. The overseas absentee voting procedure is similar in a way that the voting period is scheduled before the day the in-country elections are held; and the group of voters who are benefitted from this process are clearly defined.

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) appreciates the initiative of Senator Richard Gordon in introducing early voting. His proposal is novel because it opens early voting to all voters.

#### Coverage

The bill states, “SEC. 4-A. EARLY VOTING. - A CITIZEN WHO IS QUALIFIED TO VOTE MAY CAST HIS VOTE EARLIER THAN THE DATE OF THE ELECTION. THE EARLY VOTING PERIOD SHALL BEGIN ON THE 10TH DAY BEFORE AN ELECTION AND SHALL END ON THE 3RD DAY BEFORE THE DATE OF THE ELECTION. THE COMMISSION SHALL DESIGNATE AN EARLY VOTING PRECINCT FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY THIRTY (30) DAYS BEFORE THE DATE OF THE ELECTION.”

THE COMMISSION SHALL ISSUE THE NECESSARY RULES AND GUIDELINES TO IMPLEMENT THIS SECTION, IN CONSONANCE WITH SECTIONS 190-A AND 206-A OF THIS ACT.”

Namfrel supports this and suggests that:

- 1) It would be further specified that members of the civil service who wish to take a leave of absence for this purpose would be allowed to do so;
- 2) While the bill specifies that voting under this process be only for national positions, the restriction should be lifted when the Commission on Elections (Comelec) is able to set up a system, say through the adaption of new and appropriate technology, voters availing of the early voting process are allowed to vote for local positions; and votes cast anywhere in the country under this process would find its way to the respective voters' jurisdictions and be accurately tabulated and counted.

#### Voting Hours

The bill states that, “SEC. 190-A. EARLY VOTING HOURS. - THE CASTING OF VOTES SHALL START AT SEVEN O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING AND SHALL END AT SEVEN O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING. THE PROCEDURE FOR THE CASTING OF VOTES UNDER THE PRECEDING SECTION AND THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS SHALL BE FOLLOWED.”

Since early voting is an additional feature to increase voter participation, Namfrel does see that this participation would be further increased by a 12-hour voting period per day for the period within which the early voting process would be in effect. Namfrel suggests that the voting period be from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. only to allow the boards of election inspectors to perform their services within normal working day hours.

#### Counting of votes

The bill states, "SEC. **206-A. COUNTING OF VOTES CAST DURING THE EARLY VOTING PERIOD. - VOTES CAST DURING THE EARLY VOTING PERIOD SHALL BE COUNTED ONLY ON ELECTION DAY. THE PROCEDURE FOR THE COUNTING OF VOTES IN THE PRECEDING SECTION AND THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS SHALL BE FOLLOWED."**

Namfrel is in favor of this crafting and suggests no amendments to it.

#### Implementation

Considering that the Comelec is currently saddled with the preparations for the automation of the 2010 elections, Namfrel would like to propose that this law, should it be passed in this current congress, take effect for the elections in 2013.