

Ufisinan i Sinadora Kelly Marsh (Taitano), PhD

I Mina'trentai Singko Na Liheslaturan Guåhan

Gé'helo', Kumitehan Irensia yan i Atte siha, Plasét siha, Fina'tinas Guåhan,
Finamta' Hagåtña, Dinitetminan Maisa, yan Asuntón Rihinát Siha



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 17, 2020

GUAM LEGISLATURE PASSES BILL 330 TO HELP SAFEGUARD VOTING RIGHTS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

As the island and the world continue to face uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *I Liheslaturan Guåhan* today passed Bill 330-35 (COR) as further substituted to allow qualified voters to safely cast their ballots in the 2020 primary and general elections during the 30 day in-office absentee voting period at the Guam Election Commission. The bill was unanimously passed with 14 votes (1 excused absence).

Senator Marsh Taitano stated, **“Bill 330 helps ensure that our community does not have to choose between voting, staying healthy, or dealing with other related issues. It addresses COVID-19 related concerns and goes even further. By giving voters the option to cast their ballots during a 30 day period, Bill 330 addresses a wide variety of concerns that voters face with voting on a single day, such as struggling to arrange childcare when caregivers will also need time to vote, worrying about job security when asking for time off from work to vote on the same day that coworkers will be requesting time off to do the same, and waiting even longer in line due to additional health protocols.”**

Other places have seen declining voter registration and lower voter turnout for traditional in-person voting during the pandemic, which demonstrates the critical need to provide voters with more flexibility so that they can safely exercise their right to vote. The Centers for Disease Control has supported this idea and has recommended that more alternative voting options be provided to voters. Bill 330 does exactly this as well as makes the polling sites themselves safer by helping to alleviate crowds of people lining up to cast their ballot on election day.

At yesterday's session, Guam Election Commission Executive Director Maria Pangelinan assured the Legislature that Bill 330 is feasible for GEC to implement. When asked to outline the security measures for in-office absentee voting at yesterday's session, Pangelinan stated, **“if you voted in-office...you will...fill out an application form for the absentee ballot, sign an affidavit envelope, vote your ballot, put your ballot in your ballot envelope, seal that ballot envelope, put your ballot envelope in the affidavit envelope, [and] seal that affidavit envelope. At the end of the day, every day, for 30 days the staff reconciles how many ballots we use, how many ballots are left over, against the logbook, against the application forms, against the registry...Those ballots, at the end of the night after reconciliation, get put in a fireproof cabinet that's locked...with security cameras right either at the vault or at the fireproof cabinets.”**

Pangelinan further stated, **“We have a vault and the vault is locked and nobody goes in there by himself or herself. Two of us go in all the time. We also have fireproof cabinets with the number of absentee ballots we get...those fireproof cabinets are locked every night with the absentee ballots in them.”**

Therefore, we are confident in the Guam Election Commission to plan safe elections this year while also protecting the sanctity of voters' ballots. Offering her thoughts on the passage of Bill 330, Senator Marsh (Taitano) concluded, **“I introduced Bill 330 in March, knowing that our government would need to**

Office of Senator Kelly Marsh (Taitano), PhD

Thirty-fifth Guam Legislature

Chairperson, Committee on Heritage and the Arts, Parks, Guam Products,
Hagåtña Revitalization, Self-Determination, and Regional Affairs

adjust the way it conducts elections due to this pandemic. *Si Yu'os Ma'åse* to my bill's co-sponsor Sen. Joe San Agustin, to my colleagues, and the officials at the Guam Election Commission for working together on this important piece of legislation. I foresaw that we needed to adjust quickly, but also recognized the duty in being careful and thorough with a bill that affects our elections. We worked diligently these past three and a half months going through the entire legislative process to integrate feedback from GEC and the community. So much work and time went into crafting a responsible but flexible option for voters, and we look forward to Bill 330 being signed by *I Maga'håga*. The next step in protecting the health and voting rights of our community lies with a stroke of her pen.”

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