

TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION, 2025 SENATE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE NO. 24-02

A SENATE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE

"To amend Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to reduce the number of members in the Senate to Six and the House of Representatives to Seven, and to elect the members of the House of Representatives at-large; and for other purposes."

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1 **Section 1. Legislative Findings.** With a total population of 47,329 people based
2 on the 2020 U.S. Census, the CNMI is politically overrepresented. The CNMI's bi-
3 cameral (two house) Legislature consisting of three senatorial districts, represented by
4 twenty-nine (29) legislators is disproportionately bloated and inefficient. Based on the
5 population of the CNMI, there are far too many legislators comprising far too many
6 levels of bureaucracy within our government. Consistent with the best interests of the
7 Commonwealth, the legislative branch should be reduced to 13 members. The resulting
8 political entity will be substantially more efficient and still capable of fulfilling its
9 constitutional duties to represent the interests of all of the CNMI's people.

10 **The CNMI Is "Over-represented" based on the Objective Numbers**

11 Based on a straightforward cost-benefit analysis, the Legislature deems this
12 initiative to be necessary and prudent due to the inescapable conclusion that the CNMI
13 populace is substantially over-represented by its 29 legislators.

14 We based our findings on objective numbers to wit: Rota with approximately
15 1,893 residents is represented by three senators and one House representative. Tinian's
16 approximately 2,044 residents are similarly represented by four legislators. With
17 approximately 43,385 residents, Saipan is represented by 21 members of the legislature—
18 three senators and 18 representatives.

1 Rota and Tinian’s representation. Thus, before we even address the notion of Rota and
2 Tinian’s potential “underrepresentation” we need to acknowledge Saipan’s current status
3 as being underrepresented and the potential for this situation to get even worse as
4 populations shift.

5 **Constitutional limit of 20 House members from Saipan**

6 The constitutional limit on the size of the House of Representatives caps the
7 number of members at twenty. Thus, the CNMI House of Representatives would be even
8 larger if the population of Rota and Tinian were factored in and there was a recalculation
9 based on the principle of one person one vote. Surely our Legislature is large enough.
10 The Constitutional cap of 20 members in the House contemplated a maximum number
11 notwithstanding principles such as “one man one vote” and voter representation which
12 are deemed inapplicable to the CNMI Senate.

13 **Urgent need for change**

14 It is now time that the Legislature decreases its membership to become more
15 efficient and less costly. Instead of increasing size and costs to comply with principles of
16 “one man one vote” that will be violated nonetheless by the cap of 20 members, we
17 should be moving towards a more efficient operation. A bicameral legislature of twenty-
18 nine (29) members representing 47,329 is neither necessary nor practical in terms of
19 meeting the needs and concerns of the Commonwealth. We acknowledge that our
20 bicameral legislature was created initially to protect the interests of Rota and Tinian,
21 without whom, the Covenant would not have been signed. However, a reduction in the
22 number legislature would be more than sufficient to meet the needs and address the
23 concerns of the Commonwealth today.

24 **Quality over quantity representation**

25 While arguments can be raised that an at-large election model may jeopardize the
26 political power of minorities and in this case, Rota and Tinian constituents, these
27 concerns can be addressed and the potential harms mitigated through proper legislation
28 and enforcement as opposed to more legislators. Moreover, we simply cannot afford to
29 maintain the size of the bicameral legislature where each representative’s salary of

1 \$32,000 together with their respective fiscal year 2025 annual budget of \$105,000
2 amounts to about \$137,000 per member.

3 The resulting direct savings associated with a 13-member decrease would be
4 approximately \$1,781,000 million dollars per year. The actual savings, however, just in
5 terms of indirect costs could easily exceed ten times this figure and be used to mitigate
6 the CNMI's Retirement Fund situation and other critical needs.

7 The corresponding amendments and repealer provisions set forth herein are
8 likewise self-enacting without further legislation to ensure that the intent of this Act is
9 reflected by the amendment to Section 3 to enlarge the Senate and to Section 4 to
10 authorize this process. The Legislature contemplates that all necessary changes to
11 existing statutes, rules, and regulations will be effectuated or enacted to reflect the
12 constitutional change mandated in this initiative. Likewise, all contradictory provisions
13 should be deemed superceded upon the effective date of the constitutional provisions
14 enacted into CNMI law through the passage of this initiative.

15 **CONCLUSION**

16 In the end, the CNMI Legislature, together with the Executive and Judicial
17 branches shall be obliged to take all necessary steps to effectuate the intent of this
18 initiative. Admittedly, this measure may not be politically popular, particularly among
19 those for whom the status quo is financially profitable and politically empowering. For
20 the sake of clarity, however, this initiative is apolitical and strictly based on the objective
21 numbers. It is not designed or intended to benefit or harm one political entity or senatorial
22 district over another.

23 **Section 2. Legislative Initiative.** The Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas
24 Commonwealth Legislature, by the affirmative vote of three-fourths of the members of
25 each house present and voting, hereby proposes the following amendment to Article II of
26 the Constitution of the Northern Mariana Islands to be placed before the people for
27 ratification at the next general election:

28 **“A PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT**

1 To amend Article II of the Northern Mariana Islands Constitution
 2 by amending Section 2, Section 3, and Section 6 to reduce the number of
 3 members in the Senate to Six and the House of Representatives to Seven,
 4 to elect the members the House of Representatives at-large, and to
 5 authorize the members of the Legislature to enact local laws concurrently
 6 with municipal council members, and to authorize the Lieutenant
 7 Governor to vote in the Senate when there is a tie.

8 (a) **Amendment.** CNMI Constitution Article II, Section 2:
 9 Composition of the Senate is hereby amended to read as follows:

10 **Section 2: Composition of the Senate.**

11 a) The senate shall consist of ~~nine~~ six members with two ~~three~~
 12 members elected at large from each of three senatorial districts. The first
 13 senatorial district shall consist of Rota, the second senatorial district shall
 14 consist of Tinian and Aguiguan, and the third senatorial district shall
 15 consist of Saipan and the islands north of it. The senate shall be increased
 16 to ~~twelve~~ eight members and two ~~three~~ members shall be-elected at large
 17 from a fourth senatorial district consisting of the islands north of Saipan at
 18 the first regular general election after the population of these islands
 19 exceeds one thousand persons.

20 b) – (d) [No changes.].

21 (b) **Amendment.** CNMI Constitution Article II, Section 3:
 22 Composition of the House of Representatives is hereby amended to read
 23 as follows:

24 **Section 3: Composition of the House of Representatives.**

25 a) The house of representatives shall be composed of seven
 26 members, who shall be elected by the qualified voters of the respective
 27 representative districts. Until the next reapportionment, the representative
 28 districts and the number of representatives to be elected from each shall be
 29 as set forth in Schedule A. The house of representatives shall consist of

1 ~~fourteen members with twelve members elected from Saipan and the~~
2 ~~islands north of it, one member elected from Rota and one member elected~~
3 ~~from Tinian and Aguiguan. The number of representatives may be~~
4 ~~increased by law to not more than twenty. The term of office for~~
5 ~~representative shall be two years.~~

6 ~~b) For purposes of electing representatives Rota shall constitute~~
7 ~~one district, Tinian and Aguiguan shall constitute one district, and Saipan~~
8 ~~and the islands north of it shall constitute six districts. The legislature may~~
9 ~~change the number and boundaries of these districts only pursuant to its~~
10 ~~duties under section 4 of this article. When the population of the islands~~
11 ~~north of Saipan equals or exceeds the number of persons represented by~~
12 ~~any member of the house of representatives these islands shall constitute a~~
13 ~~separate district electing one representative.~~

14 ~~e) b) A representative shall be qualified to vote in the~~
15 ~~Commonwealth, at least twenty-one years of age, and a resident and~~
16 ~~domiciliary of the Commonwealth for at least three years immediately~~
17 ~~preceding the date on which the representative takes office. A longer~~
18 ~~residency and domicile requirement may be provided by law.~~

19 ~~d) c) A candidate for the house of representatives shall be a~~
20 ~~registered voter of the election precinct where he or she is a candidate.”~~

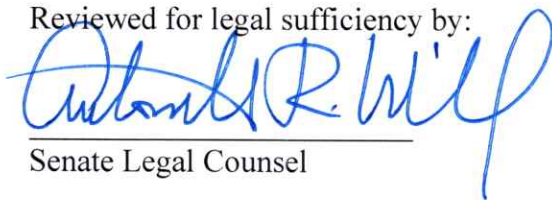
21 **Section 3. Adoption and Transmittal.** The President of the Senate and the
22 Speaker of the House shall certify, and the Senate Legislative Secretary and the House
23 Clerk shall attest to the adoption of this Legislative Initiative. The Senate Clerk shall
24 then transmit a certified copy of the Initiative to the Governor and the Board of Elections.
25 Pursuant to Article XVIII, Section 5 of the Commonwealth Constitution, the Board shall
26 place this Legislative Initiative, with the Findings and Purpose section herein, before the
27 people of the Commonwealth for ratification vote at the earlier of the next regular general
28 election or the next special election established by law.

Prefiled:

Date: 07/11/25

Introduced By: 
Sen. Manny Gregory Tenorio Castro

Reviewed for legal sufficiency by:


Senate Legal Counsel