

Policy Proposal: Modernizing the FSM Five-Year Residency Requirement

Title

A Proposal to Update the Residency Requirement for Candidates Seeking Election to the Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia

Purpose

To modernize the eligibility requirements for national office so that all FSM citizens—whether residing in the islands or abroad—are treated fairly, represented equally, and empowered to serve their nation without outdated barriers.

Background

The FSM Constitution currently requires candidates for Congress to have resided in the FSM for at least five consecutive years prior to the election. This requirement was created in 1979, before large-scale migration, before modern communication, and before the FSM diaspora became a vital part of the national economy and political community.

Today, tens of thousands of FSM citizens live abroad for education, employment, military service, and family obligations. They contribute significantly to their home communities through remittances, leadership, and advocacy. Yet these same citizens are barred from running for national office, even though they remain eligible—and expected—to vote.

This creates a structural imbalance:

- Citizens abroad can vote, but cannot be voted for.
- The nation benefits from their contributions, but denies them equal opportunity to serve.

Problem Statement

The five-year physical residency requirement no longer reflects the realities of FSM citizenship. It unfairly excludes qualified, committed citizens who maintain strong ties to their home communities but temporarily reside abroad. This exclusion weakens national unity, limits the pool of capable leaders, and contradicts the democratic principle that all citizens should have equal opportunity to participate in their government.

Proposal Summary

This proposal recommends replacing the strict five-year physical residency requirement with a modern, inclusive standard that recognizes:

- Continuous FSM citizenship
- Ongoing ties to one's home state
- Commitment to the nation
- The realities of modern mobility

Proposed Reform

1. Eliminate the requirement for five consecutive years of physical presence in the FSM.

2. Replace it with a requirement that candidates must:

Be citizens of the FSM

Be registered voters of their home state

Demonstrate ongoing connection to their community (e.g., land rights, family ties, traditional obligations, or community involvement)

Not have renounced or suspended their FSM citizenship

3. Allow time spent abroad for education, employment, military service, medical care, or family obligations to count as valid residency for eligibility purposes.

Rationale

- **Fairness:** All citizens deserve equal opportunity to serve their nation.
- **Unity:** The FSM is stronger when all its people—home and abroad—are included.
- **Modernization:** The Constitution should reflect today's realities, not the world of 1979.
- **Representation:** Diaspora communities deserve leaders who understand their experiences and challenges.
- **National Strength:** Expanding eligibility increases the pool of capable, educated, and experienced leaders.

Expected Benefits

- Greater national unity and inclusion
- Stronger democratic representation
- Increased participation from highly skilled citizens
- More equitable treatment of FSM citizens abroad
- A modernized constitutional framework aligned with global standards

Conclusion

Updating the five-year residency requirement is not merely a legal adjustment—it is a statement of national identity. It affirms that FSM citizenship does not end at the border, and that every citizen, no matter where they live, remains part of the nation's story and future.

This reform strengthens democracy, honors fairness, and ensures that the FSM remains a nation where every citizen has the right to serve.

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