



LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICE
QUICK NOTES
Second Regular Session, 19th Congress

Public Hearing of the Committee on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation

Chairperson: Sen. Imee R. Marcos

13 February 2024, Tuesday, 10:00 AM, Senate Session Hall

Re: I. Signature Campaign for People's Initiative

P. S. Res. No. 902—Sen. Imee R. Marcos

II. Providing for a System of Initiative and Referendum

P. S. Res. No. 903—Sen. Imee R. Marcos

III. Privilege Speeches

- **Sen. Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa—delivered on January 23, 2024**
- **Sen. Risa Hontiveros—delivered on January 29, 2024**

Background

- On February 2, 2024, the Committee on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation, chaired by Sen. Imee R. Marcos, resumed its inquiry on the alleged involvement of politicians in the signature campaign for People's Initiative, aimed at amending the 1987 Constitution in Davao City.
- The hearing was attended by Senators Go and Dela Rosa, both from Davao, and several local government officials and residents.
- The People's Initiative is a grassroots effort to gather signatures from registered voters to influence legislative or policy changes. RA 6735, known as the Initiative and Referendum Act, grants people the power to propose constitutional amendments.

Highlights of the Committee Hearing

- The inquiry focused on the testimonies of different barangay residents of Davao City, who were purportedly enticed and promised various incentives in exchange for their signatures supporting the People's Initiative. These incentives include financial assistance, food packages, and other benefits.
- Senator Dela Rosa urged witnesses and resource persons to tell the truth behind politicians' involvement in the signature campaign for the People's Initiative. The Senator assured them that the Senate would hold accountable those who took advantage of getting their signatures in exchange for financial help.
- Senator Go cautioned against deception in the People's Initiative, urging fellow public servants to remain vigilant and to protect Filipino interests. He emphasized Chief Justice Davide's assertion that the initiative should be conducted with absolute good faith, stating that any involvement of vice or corruption tarnishes its integrity. The Senator stressed the need for investigation into allegations of monetary inducement for signatures across various districts.
- Governor Edwin I. Jubahib of Davao del Norte highlighted the flaws in the People's Initiative signature campaign, noting inadequate briefing of signatories regarding the proposed constitutional amendments, including the abolition of the Senate. The process involved distributing forms and summoning individuals to sign at barangay halls, led by elected officials without sufficient explanation. Additionally, the Governor strongly opposed abolishing the Senate due to concerns about power consolidation and silencing the majority's voice.
- Regarding the signature sheets for Region XI, COMELEC Regional Election Officer Tambuang said that the three election officers in Davao City are keeping the signature sheets for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Districts in their respective offices.
- Senator Dela Rosa raised concerns about the absence of recall policies from the national COMELEC and asked about the process at the regional level for individuals who wish to withdraw their signatures. The Regional Election Officer responded that they would require an affidavit for any recall of signatures, and would compile it to verify the withdrawal.
- Mr. Lachica, Chairperson of NAMFREL Davao City, expressed his concern regarding witness statements as well as his support for COMELEC's efforts to address the situation. He stressed the importance of following legal procedures and praised the investigation to hold accountable those responsible. Mr. Lachica also commended the commitment to uphold constitutional processes and urged the House of Representatives to acknowledge the necessity for a bicameral approach.
- Senator Marcos emphasized that the purpose of the proceeding was not to shame or ridicule some officials, but rather to establish that signatories to the People's

Initiative were unaware of what they were signing. She highlighted instances where witnesses were allegedly induced and paid to compel them into signing.

- Ms. Caritos from Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) explained their documentation process, which involves interviewing individuals to determine if they were offered benefits or coerced into signing documents. LENTE aims to verify existing reports of witness statements and allegations that signature campaign proponents used government social benefit programs to coerce support. They encourage the public to coordinate with them to document the incidents related to the People's Initiative signing and to await COMELEC guidelines on signature withdrawal procedures.

Possible Points for Discussion

1. Current progress of the People's Initiative aimed at amending the Constitution, with a focus on understanding the criteria and representation requirements and their implications for democratic participation;
2. Allegations of corruption surrounding party-list coordinators involved in garnering support for the initiative, and assessing the potential repercussions on the credibility and fairness of the process;
3. Crucial aspects of transparency, integrity, and accountability within constitutional initiatives, and exploring mechanisms to address any instances of misconduct or irregularities;
4. Supreme Court decisions regarding constitutional amendment procedures, particularly the role of the COMELEC, and considering their impact on the legislative process and democratic principles;
5. Effectiveness of Republic Act No. 6735 in facilitating citizen-led initiatives for constitutional amendments, and identifying potential areas for improvement or reform.;
6. Concerns regarding the commercialization of government processes and its implications for democratic governance, public trust, and the protection of citizen rights;
7. Measures to hold accountable those found guilty of corruption or malpractice in constitutional initiatives, including recommendations for legal prosecution and the enactment of stricter penalties to deter future wrongdoing;
8. Senate's stance on implementing reforms, whether through legislative actions or constitutional amendments, to strengthen democratic institutions and processes; and
9. Cross-reference of information with those gathered by the Subcommittee on RBH No. 6 under the Committee on Constitutional Amendments and Revision of Codes on the more substantial aspects of amending the Constitution.