A BILL FOR AN ACT

To amend the Revised National Election Act of 2005 by amending section 602 of title 9 of the Code of the Federated States of Micronesia (Annotated), to allow staff at the embassy or consulate to receive and count absentee ballots, and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA:

Section 1. Section 602 of title 9 of the Code of the Federated States of Micronesia (Annotated) is hereby amended to read as follows:

"Section 602. Voting absentee ballot by mail.

(1) Any Registered Voter who will be outside his or her State of registration on Election Day may vote absentee ballot by mail.

(2) Deadlines for submitting requests to vote absentee ballot by mail.

(a) In the case of a general election, the request to vote absentee ballot by mail, using the forms required by the rules and regulations promulgated pursuant to this title, must be received by the national election commissioner of the State in which the voter is registered not more than 150 days but not less than 40 days before Election Day.

(b) In the case of a special election, the request to vote absentee ballot by mail must be received
by the national election commissioner of the State in
which the voter is registered not more than 50 days but
not less than 35 days before the day of the special
election.

(c) If the absentee voter currently resides in a
foreign country where the Federated States of Micronesia
maintains an embassy or consulate, then a request to
vote absentee ballot by mail may alternatively be sent
to the embassy or consulate, which shall then forward a
copy of the request to the National Election Director,
or his or her designee, for verification and processing.
The absentee voter shall indicate on the request form
whether he or she intends to pick up his or her absentee
ballot at the embassy or consulate.

(d) The voter is solely responsible for ensuring
that the request to vote absentee ballot by mail is
received by the deadline. Delayed and lost mail for
absentee ballot requests shall not create any obligation
of the National Election Director or the national
election commissioner to provide absentee ballots at any
time after the time periods set forth herein have
expired.

(e) Upon receipt of a request to vote absentee
ballot by mail, the name of the requestor and the time
and the date of receipt of the request must be recorded.
The national election commissioner, shall, no later than 2 days from receipt of the request, act on the request and mail back to the requester an absentee ballot provided that printed ballots are already available. If printed ballots are available at the time a request is received, the name of the requestor and the time and date of receipt of the request must still be recorded, and an absentee ballot shall be mailed to the requester no later than 5 days after the printing of ballots has been completed. Absentee voters who have indicated on their request forms that they intend to pick up their absentee ballot at an embassy or consulate shall retrieve their ballot from the embassy or consulate.

The National Election Director shall provide sufficient absentee ballots to the embassy or consulate 10 days before a National election. The National Election Director shall authorize any staff at the embassy or consulate to receive and count any absentee ballot sent to each embassy or consulate.

(f) The National Election Director, or his or her designee, shall strike out or delete the entry of the absentee voter on the Signature List for that voter's regular Polling Place. The absentee voter shall not be allowed to cast a ballot at his or her regular Polling Place on Election Day.
(3) Marking and returning of absentee ballots by mail.

(a) An absentee ballot by mail shall include the following parts: an official ballot, a ballot envelope, an affidavit prescribed by the National Election Director, and a covering reply envelope.

(b) The absentee voter shall mark the ballot in the usual manner provided by law and in such manner that no person can see or know how the ballot is marked. The absentee voter shall then deposit the ballot in the envelope and securely seal the same. The absentee voter shall then complete and execute the affidavit. The ballot envelope and the affidavit shall then be enclosed and sealed in the covering reply envelope.

(c) Absentee ballots and affidavits must be received by the national election commissioner of the State issuing the absentee ballot no later than the established closing hour of the Polls on Election Day. If an absentee voter resides in a foreign country where the Federated States of Micronesia maintains an embassy or consulate, and the absentee voter had submitted his or her request to vote absentee ballot to that embassy or consulate, then the absentee voter may alternatively deliver his or her absentee ballot and affidavit to that embassy or consulate. The absentee ballot and affidavit
must be received by the embassy or consulate no later than the established closing hour of the Polls on Election Day.

(d) Absentee ballots received at a post office in the Federated States of Micronesia on Election Day shall be stamped with the time and date of their receipt.

(4) Disposition of absentee ballots by mail.

(a) Upon the receipt of an absentee ballot, the national election commissioner, or his or her appointee, shall open it, remove the ballot envelope, and examine the affidavit. If the national election commissioner or his or her appointee determines that the absentee ballot is valid, the ballot envelope shall be deposited unopened in a container retained for that purpose. The container shall be securely sealed except for an opening sufficient to permit deposit of ballot envelopes and shall be marked with the name and official title of the national election commissioner, or his or her appointee, and the words, 'This container holds absentee ballots and must be opened only pursuant to law. The national election commissioner, or his or her designee, shall safely keep each container secured in the commissioner's office until Election Day.

(b) On Election Day, the national election
commissioner, or his or her designee, shall open the container, extract and segregate the ballot envelopes, and deliver such envelopes to the counting and tabulation committee. Each candidate, or his or her representative, shall have the opportunity to be present during this process.

(c) An absentee ballot may be determined to be invalid if:

(i) the affidavit is found to be insufficient;

(ii) the signatures on the request for the ballot and the affidavit do not correspond;

(iii) the request for the ballot was not properly made or was untimely, as set forth in this section;

(iv) the ballot was not returned in a timely fashion, as set forth in this section;

(v) the ballot was returned in a bundle with other ballots;

(vi) the voter is not qualified to vote;

(vii) the voter is not registered to vote;

(viii) the ballot envelope is open or has been opened and resealed; or

(ix) the voter has already voted.

(d) The ballot envelope of an invalid absentee
ballot shall not be opened and the national election commissioner or his appointee shall mark across its face 'Rejected,' and write the reason for the rejection, and shall preserve the same in the manner and for the period of time required under this title for regular ballots cast in an election. At the end of this time period, the invalid absentee ballots shall be destroyed without being opened in the manner provided under this title.'

Section 2. This act shall become law upon approval by the President of the Federated States of Micronesia or upon its becoming law without such approval.

Date: 1/14/21

Introduced by: /s/ Victor V. Gouland

Victor V. Gouland