

PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (COVID-19 SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS) BILL PASSED TO ENSURE A SAFE ELECTION FOR ALL

1. The Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Bill has been passed in Parliament on 4 May 2020, allowing the Elections Department (ELD) to implement special, temporary arrangements¹ to ensure the safety of voters, candidates and election officials, should the next General Election (GE) take place amid the COVID-19 situation.
2. The key provisions in this Bill are in two main parts:
 - (i) The first part deals with voters who are under COVID-19 stay order, commonly known as “Stay Home Notice” (SHN), or COVID-19 Quarantine Order (QO), or are on MC because of Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI).
 - (ii) The second part allows an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his or her nomination papers if the aspiring candidate is unable or unfit to do so because of a COVID-19 SHN or QO, or is hospitalised or in ill health.

Allowing voters subject to a COVID-19 movement control order to vote

3. In his Second Reading speech in Parliament on 4 May 2020, Minister Chan Chun Sing explained that the Bill will allow voters serving SHN at designated facilities (typically hotels) to vote outside their electoral divisions either at the designated facilities at which they are staying or some other suitable premises, which we term special polling stations. These arrangements allow more voters to be able to vote than it would otherwise be under previous rules.

Special arrangements for voters staying at designated facilities

4. Voters on SHN at each special polling station can mark their ballot papers in secret and deposit them in a single ballot box even though they are from different electoral divisions. Candidates – independent or representing a political party – can be present at these special polling stations (regardless of electoral division) to observe the proceedings. A political party, or an independent candidate contesting in an SMC, or a group of independent candidates contesting at a GRC can also send one polling agent each to observe the proceedings.

5. At the close of polls, the ballot box from each special polling station will be sealed and transported under police escort to a designated counting centre. As with other polling stations, candidates or their polling agents who are present in the special polling stations may place their seals on the ballot boxes.

¹ The provisions in the Bill are temporary arrangements, which means that they will only apply to the next GE, which has to be held by 14 Apr 2021, and not to any election held after the stipulated date.

6. The counting of the ballots will be done at a centralised counting centre, where ballots from the various special polling stations will be mixed together, and then sorted for counting. This will preserve voting secrecy.

7. This special arrangement for voters staying at designated facilities is akin to that for overseas voting.

Allowing an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his nomination papers on his behalf if he is unable or unfit to do so

8. The Bill will also allow an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his nomination papers on his behalf if he is unable or unfit to do so because of a COVID-19 SHN or QO, or if he is hospitalised or in ill health. The authorised representative must possess a Power of Attorney expressly authorising the representative to represent and act on behalf of the aspiring candidate at nomination proceedings. This must include an authorisation to submit nomination papers and raise objections to the nomination papers of other candidates. The authorised representative must be a Singapore citizen who is entitled to vote.

9. There is no authorisation to substitute subscribers, as subscribers can be any person whose name is in the relevant register of electors. Aspiring candidates should find a replacement if any of their subscribers is on SHN, QO, or on MC for ARI, or having a fever or ARI symptoms on the day of nomination.

10. The Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Bill forms part of the ELD's contingency planning for the next GE, which must be held by 14 April 2021. The Bill is not related to the timing of the General Election. The Prime Minister will decide when to call the election, considering the challenges confronting the country and the evolving COVID-19 situation.

11. The Bill also does not cover other precautionary measures that the ELD is planning for, such as those on campaigning. The ELD will share the guidelines for campaigning in due course, taking into account the prevailing advisories from the Ministry of Health, for all parties to have the necessary preparation time.

12. The Bill reflects the ELD's strong commitment to safeguard the safety and health of voters, candidates and election officials at every stage of the electoral process.

Issued by
Elections Department
Prime Minister's Office

4 May 2020