

PRESS RELEASE

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS ON VOTING ARRANGEMENTS TO IMPROVE VOTING ACCESSIBILITY

In May and June 2022, the Elections Department (ELD) engaged various stakeholders, including political parties, nursing home operators and overseas Singaporeans, to seek their feedback on the introduction of special voting arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes and postal voting for overseas Singaporeans.

2 ELD received feedback from 13 political parties and 39 nursing home operators, and close to 3,300 responses from overseas Singaporeans and members of the public. They generally welcomed the introduction of the new voting arrangements and shared useful views on various implementation issues. ELD has carefully considered the feedback and has outlined our responses in the Annex attached.

3 ELD would like to thank all respondents for taking the time to participate in this engagement exercise. Their feedback will help the ELD to finetune our recommendations for the proposed voting arrangements.

**ISSUED BY
ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE**

26 JULY 2022

ELD's Responses to Key Feedback on New Voting Arrangements

(A) Special voting arrangements at some nursing homes (pilot)

Stakeholders were generally supportive of the move to pilot special voting arrangements at nursing homes, but shared a few concerns and challenges:

- (a) Ensuring voting secrecy, particularly for bedbound voters who might vote in close proximity to other residents, and preventing undue influence from nursing home staff or next-of-kin during voting;
- (b) Ascertaining whether nursing home residents have the mental capacity to vote;
- (c) Ensuring the safety of nursing home residents; and
- (d) Operational and resource concerns on setting up the on-site polling station and administering the bed-to-bed polling (e.g. insufficient manpower to support the proposed voting arrangements).

Ensuring transparency and voting secrecy, and preventing undue influence

2 To ensure transparency and voting secrecy, candidates/polling agents will be allowed to observe polling in the nursing homes. For the bed-to-bed polling by mobile polling teams, a portable lap booth will be provided so that voters can mark their ballot papers in private shielded by the front and sides of the booth.

3 To address the concern that voters may be influenced by the nursing home staff during voting, ELD will provide clear guidelines on what nursing home staff can and cannot do. For instance, nursing home staff can help a voter to sit up at his bed in preparation for the bed-to-bed polling but will be required to move away when the voter is ready to vote. Nursing home staff are also not allowed to mark the ballot paper on behalf of a voter or engage in any actions that may influence a voter when he marks the ballot paper. If a voter is physically unable to mark the ballot paper, he can request for an election official to assist him to do so, similar to what is done at a regular polling station. A second election official will witness the process as a safeguard.

Handling voters who may lack the mental capacity to vote

4 For parity and consistency, ELD will align the approach to handle nursing home voters who may lack the mental capacity to vote with the current approach adopted at regular polling stations. For example, the voter will not be issued a ballot paper if he

does not respond to the election official's repeated requests for his identification document and poll card.

Ensuring the safety of nursing home residents

5 ELD will take guidance from prevailing public health and relevant guidelines to ensure the health and safety of nursing home residents. If the guidelines do not allow election officials to access the nursing homes, the special voting arrangements at nursing homes will be suspended.

Finalising parameters for the pilot

6 Taking into consideration feedback from key stakeholders that the profile of the residents across nursing homes can vary widely in terms of their physical and mental health, ELD will engage the nursing home operators further to better understand the profile of nursing homes before finalising the parameters and selection criteria for the pilot.

(B) Postal voting for overseas Singaporeans

7 ELD conducted an online survey of overseas Singaporeans' views on postal voting and received a total of 3,221 responses from across 64 countries. 82% of respondents expressed support for the initiative, with convenience and being able to exercise the right to vote while living overseas as the top two reasons cited for their support. 83% of 1,771 respondents who had never voted while living overseas indicated their willingness to take part in postal voting. Notwithstanding the majority support for postal voting, respondents expressed a few key concerns, as follows:

- (a) *Security and secrecy of the ballot.* There were concerns with the handling and processing of postal votes including how to deal with damaged, lost, or delayed mails;
- (b) *Transparency of process.* There were suggestions to address allegations of ballot stuffing by making available information on the total number of overseas voters and the breakdown by those who opted for postal voting or in-person voting at overseas polling stations; and
- (c) *Ease and cost of postal voting.* The postage cost to mail the marked postal ballot paper and the need to self-print the return envelope and postal ballot paper were seen as potential disincentives. There were concerns that the postal ballot papers may not reach ELD or may reach ELD after the deadline to be accepted for counting due to varying reliability of postal services.

Ensuring security and secrecy of the ballot

8 To ensure voting secrecy and security of the process, on top of requiring the postal voter to log in to the secure ELD Voter Services using Singpass to authenticate his identity and to download the return envelope and postal ballot paper, ELD will a) implement safeguards such as incorporating a unique QR code (that does not contain any personal information or identifiers) on each return envelope so that only envelopes with valid QR code will be accepted. This will also ensure that only one postal ballot paper from each registered overseas voter will be counted; and b) leverage technology to verify the wet-ink signature on the return envelope against the specimen signature furnished earlier during the registration of overseas voters, as another form of authentication.

Ensuring transparency

9 To ensure transparency, ELD will a) spell out criteria for the rejection of return envelopes in the legislation e.g. damaged or unsealed envelopes, multiple envelopes with the same QR Code received from one individual, signature on the envelope does not match the specimen signature, and envelope contains more than one postal ballot paper; b) make available information on overseas voters e.g. number of registered overseas voters to allow candidates and counting agents to verify that there is no ballot paper stuffing or non-legitimate ballots being accepted into the count; and c) provide an update to postal voters on whether their return envelopes were received by ELD, after the counting of overseas votes.

Facilitating return of ballots and administrative convenience

10 Postal voters can start downloading and self-printing both their postal ballot paper and return envelope starting from the day after Nomination Day. The marked postal ballot papers must be posted before Polling Day in Singapore and reach ELD no later than 10 days after Polling Day. This will provide postal voters with sufficient time to mark the postal ballot papers and mail back to ELD in time to be counted (i.e. from the day after Nomination Day to the 10th day after Polling Day in Singapore).

11 Additionally, ELD will provide postage-paid return envelopes for overseas postal voters where this is available. This will help avoid delays that may otherwise happen due to insufficient postage.