

FILIPINOS GAIN RIGHTS THEY CAN HOLD DUAL CITIZENSHIP, VOTE IN ELECTIONS BACK HOME.

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

A new law in the Philippines will allow citizens of that country residing abroad to hold dual citizenship and vote in Philippine elections.

Known as the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003, the policy will allow citizens who lost their Philippine's citizenship by becoming U.S. citizens to reapply for citizenship in their own country while continuing to maintain their status here according to Angelo Macatangay of Miami, the Honorary Counsel of the Philippines for south Florida who is currently serving Filipinos throughout the state.

“Those people who lost their Philippine citizenship when they became citizens of the U.S. can now apply for dual status by taking an oath of allegiance,” Macatangay said.

To do so, they must provide proof that they are a natural born citizen of the Philippines either through a birth certificate or some other legal document, Macatangay explained.

They will also have to provide other legal documents such as a valid foreign passport, or documents demonstrating why their name may have changed through marriage, divorce, adoption or for other reasons.

“The documents will need to be sent to the Philippine embassy in Washington, or to a consulate in Agana, Guam, Chicago, Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York City, Saipan or San Francisco,” Macatangay said.

He advised, however, that Philippine residents in south Florida make an appointment with his office to make certain that all of their papers are in order before sending them to one of the official offices. The phone number in the Miami consulate is 305-895-2227.

There are a number of benefits of applying for the dual citizenship status, Macatangay said. “Each person will obtain the rights of Philippine citizenship including the right to vote and hold public office,” he explained. “They will also assume the obligations of being a citizen of the Philippines.”

“For example, doctors and nurses must be Philippine citizens to practice there,” he said. Dual citizens would be able to begin working there if they wanted to.”

In addition, the ownership of land by non-citizens is restricted in the Philippines, and citizens will be better able to obtain property for residential or commercial use.

“I think that this information will be very valuable to the 70,000 Filipinos who live in south Florida and the 150,000 to 200,000 Filipinos who live throughout Florida,” Macatangay said.

“Philippines who live here lost their voice back home,” said Rose Marie Del Rosario the Program Director of the Nanay Center in North Miami. “Family ties are strong with those back home.”

However, Del Rosario said that she has not applied for the dual citizen status because she has been here for so long that she doesn’t feel the need to maintain her Philippine citizenship.

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