

**TENTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE**

**H.L.I. NO. 10-8, SS1**

**FOURTH REGULAR SESSION, 1997**

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**A LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE**

To propose a constitutional amendment to update the legislative budget ceiling to provide sufficient funding for an effective and independent legislative branch supported by professional and technical staff and appropriate resources, and guarantee an equitable distribution of funds for the personal staff and offices of each member of the legislature, so that each can function properly as an independent representative elected by the people.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE TENTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

Section 1. Legislative Initiative. Pursuant to Article XVIII, Section 3 of the Commonwealth Constitution, the Tenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature, by the affirmative vote of three-fourths of the members of each house present and voting, hereby proposes the following amendment to the Constitution to be placed before the people for ratification in the next regular general election as provided in Article XVIII, Section 5 of the Commonwealth Constitution:

**"A PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT**

To amend Article II, Section 16 of the Commonwealth Constitution to update the legislative budget ceiling to provide sufficient funding for an effective and independent legislative branch supported by professional and technical staff and appropriate resources, and guarantee an equitable distribution of funds for the personal staff and offices of each member of the legislature, so that each can function properly as an independent representative elected by the people.

I. Article II, Section 16 is amended to read:

Section 16. Budget Ceiling. There shall be a ceiling on the budget of the legislature.

a) Appropriations, or obligations and expenditures, ~~exclusive of the salaries of the members of the legislature,~~ for the operations and activities of the legislature and legislative bureau, other than the salaries of members of the legislature, any payments required by law to be made as an employer contribution to any Commonwealth government retirement fund, and major

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equipment or capital improvement projects, may not exceed two million eight hundred thousand dollars in any fiscal year the budget ceiling provided in this section.

b) Each member of each house shall receive an equal amount within this ceiling not to exceed one hundred fifty-five thousand dollars annually for office and related expenses including all expenses for travel. Members may voluntarily pool all or any part of these funds.

c) The presiding officer in each house shall receive within this ceiling an additional amount not to exceed four hundred thousand dollars a year to support the operations and activities of that house, to be expended according to the rules of that house. A portion of such amount shall be equally distributed to the standing committees of that house for their operations and activities.

d) The legislative bureau shall have a budget of not more than two million dollars, for the purposes specified in section 17. The Bureau may not purchase, rent, or lease vehicles for the use of individual members of the legislature or their offices. The Bureau may not defray travel expenses of individual members of the legislature or their personal staff except as approved by joint resolution of the legislature. The term 'major equipment or capital improvement projects' in subsection (a) does not include the purchase, rental, or lease of vehicles for the use of individual members of the legislature or their offices.

e) Beginning the second Monday of January 1998, the amount of the ceiling and all other dollar amounts stated in this section shall be adjusted every two years by the same percentage as the percentage change in the United States Department of Commerce composite price index during the two preceding fiscal years using the beginning of fiscal year 1996 as the base.

f) No part of the appropriations for the legislature or the legislative bureau, other than a member's salary, may be used for personal or political activities.

g) Obligations and expenditures for the operations and activities of the legislature for the period October 1 through the second Monday in January of a fiscal year in which there is a regular general election may not exceed seven hundred thousand dollars or twenty five percent of the annual spending authority otherwise available provided by law consistent with this section. This

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ceiling shall apply to the various offices and activities in the same proportions as the annual spending authority provided by law consistent with this section.

II. Repealer.

Subsection (f) of Section 17 of Article II of the Commonwealth Constitution is repealed."

Section 2. Adoption and Transmittal. The President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House shall certify, and the Clerks of the Senate and House shall attest to the adoption of this Legislative Initiative by the affirmative vote of three-fourths of the members of each house present and voting. The House Clerk shall then cause the Initiative to be transmitted to the Governor and the Board of Elections. Pursuant to Article XVIII, Section 5 of the Commonwealth Constitution, the Board shall place this Legislative Initiative before the people of the Commonwealth for a ratification vote in the next regular general election (November 1, 1997).

**Passed by the House of Representatives on September 19, 1997 and the Senate on September 17, 1997, with the affirmative vote of three-fourths (3/4) of the members of each house present and voting.**

**CERTIFIED BY:**

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/s/ Diego T. Benavente  
**DIEGO T. BENAVENTE**  
Speaker of the House

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/s/ Jesus R. Sablan  
**JESUS R. SABLAN**  
President of the Senate

**ATTESTED BY:**

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/s/ Evelyn C. Fleming  
**EVELYN C. FLEMING**  
House Clerk

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/s/ Nicolasa B. Borja  
**NICOLASA B. BORJA**  
Senate Clerk