



## CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES CHICAGO

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### FIL-AM VOTERS EDUCATION FORUM HELD IN CHICAGO

Chicago, 28 August 2018 – Aimed at informing the Filipino-American electorate in the State of Illinois on the significance of elections and their right of suffrage, a voters' education forum was held Saturday morning at the Seafood City Community Center in Chicago.

Consul General Gina A. Jamoralin happily noted the turnout and welcomed the audience composed of leaders and members of the Filipino-American community representing various organizations. She likewise thanked the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) and the Cook County Clerk's Office for partnering with the Philippine Consulate General in launching such initiative, as well as Seafood City management for generously hosting the program.

Promoting a more active civic engagement and participation by the Filipino community in the State of Illinois, Consul General Jamoralin called on eligible Filipino-Americans to register and vote in the coming elections. She pointed out that they can express their needs, interests and concerns through the ballot not only for the benefit of their families, but also for the entire community.

Ms. Angeles "Jelly" Carandang, NaFFAA Director of Special Projects and Board of Trustees Member, shared that the aspiration for a stronger and clearer Filipino-American voice is within reach through a committed and responsible exercise of their voting rights. A table was set up for voter registration and application for the Congressional Gold Medal for FilVets of WWII as part of the programs and services of NaFFAA.

Making the event more meaningful was a message from Mayor Ron Falconi, the first Filipino-American Mayor in Ohio. He recounted how he got involved in public service and decided to seek public office after realizing he had the passion and ideas to improve local governance. In his city of Brunswick with a population of around 35,000 where more than 95% are Whites and only a handful are Filipino-Americans, he first held a council seat in 2008. He was elected mayor in 2013 and won a fresh four-year mandate last November. With only one vote separating him from his contender in his first successful run, he stressed that it is important to remember that "every, single vote counts," and Filipino-Americans should never lose heart in participating in all elections.

Outreach Director of the Cook County Clerk's Office Mark Mesle discussed the history of voting rights in the U.S. and Illinois noting how Americans fought for such right against a monarchical system that deprived subjects of the power to change and choose their leaders. He further presented the different modes of registration and voting in Illinois which has made the exercise of democracy easier through the years.



Exchanging views and eliciting comments from the audience, Mr. Mesle touched on reasons why people tend to shy away from elections – foremost of which is apathy – and how voting rights can be promoted for the community's empowerment. Different local jurisdictions will have different names on the ballot, but he explained that across the state the positions of Governor, U.S. House Representatives, State Representatives, State Senators, Attorney General, Treasure, Comptroller, Secretary of State, Judges and County offices will be up for election. He also brought with him and did a demonstration on the use of the official voting machines to those interested.

Some of the up-and-coming young and talented Filipino-Americans volunteered their help with the program. Ms. Louella Cabalona, lead singer of the Sama-Sama Project and a former delegate of the Filipino Young Leaders Program, and Ms. Mia Rivera Raguay, a youth leader of the Philippine American Ecumenical Church, performed and led the singing of the national anthems of the Philippines and the United States. Everett Francis Icao, former Executive Board Member of the college-based MAFA and a member of the Knights of Rizal, ably did the emceeing.

The assembly represented the Alliance of Certified Home Health Agencies in Illinois, Agape, Annak Ti Batac, Confraternity of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, Davao Association of the Midwest, Divine Mercy Community, Filipino American Association of South DuPage, Filipino Americans of Morton Grove, Filipinos In Alliance, Knights of Rizal, Lion's Heart Christian Ministries, Magnificent Lions Club, Migrante Chicago, Mont Clare United Church of Christ, National Alliance for Filipino Concerns, National Federation of Filipino American Associations, Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Chicago, Philippine American Ecumenical Church, Philippine Engineers and Scientists Organization, Philippine Senior Golfers Association, Quezon Association of the Midwest, and Zamboanga del Norte Association of Illinois.

Overall feedback on the initiative by the Consulate General was positive and a possible follow-up session is being planned before November. At least one community organization signified an interest in having a similar forum held for their members and other Filipino-Americans in Indiana. **END**





**Above:** Mr. Mark Mesle, Outreach Director of the Cook County Clerk's Office; Consul General Gina A. Jamoralin; Mayor Ron Falconi of Brunswick, Ohio; and Ms. Angeles "Jelly" Carandang, NaFFAA Director of Special Projects and Board of Trustees Member. **Below:** Mr. Mesle is shown delivering his presentation to leaders and members of various Filipino community organizations.





**Left:** Participants at the Voters Education Forum listen intently to the message of Fil-Am Mayor Falconi who emphasized that “every, single vote counts.” **Right:** Mr. Mesle demonstrating how the electronic voting machine used by election boards across Illinois works.