

# Officials seek to define 'Chamorro' as political group

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Lawmakers still have not acted on a process to identify voters who will be eligible for the July 1, Chamorro-only political status plebiscite.

However, attorneys and senators said they feel the definition of "Chamorro" that will be included in the legislation will stand up to court challenges. The proposed regulations define Chamorros as a political, rather than a racial, group, said attorney Charles Troutman.

The Legislature scrutinized the registry regulations after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a Hawaiian-only election was unconstitu-

## Chamorro Plebiscite 2 0 0 0

tional. Troutman, an advisor to the Commission on Decolonization and other government offices working on the plebiscite preparation, said the Hawaiian law specifically mentioned people with "Hawaiian blood."

In contrast, Guam's political status plebiscite would allow people to vote if they can trace their ancestry to Guam in 1898. The definition is based on language in Guam's original Organic Act of 1950.

### WHAT IS IT?

▲ Voters will choose between statehood, independence and free association with the United States.

▲ Only those who can be considered as Chamorros, based on a definition that the Guam Legislature is working on, can participate in the plebiscite, a non-binding vote that

will determine the course of Guam's future status negotiations with the United States.

▲ Identifying and registering qualified voters are the responsibilities of the Chamorro Registry Advisory Board, which reports to the Guam Election Commission.

### WHAT'S NEXT

▲ The Guam Legislature is expected to hold session on Wednesday to discuss and possibly vote on legislation that includes a definition of who can be considered Chamorro voters.

"Our argument is, that's a political grouping, not a racial one," Troutman said. The argument is further supported by some historians' belief that as far back as the 1860s, the Spanish used the term "Chamorro" to refer to any inhabitants of

Guam, regardless of ethnic background, who were not Spanish subjects, Troutman said.

At a Decolonization Commission meeting on Thursday, Sens. Mark Forbes and Ben Pangelinan said lawmakers are approaching the

Chamorro definition very carefully to avoid questions of constitutionality. Though the definition being discussed in the Legislature should stand up in court, Troutman added, "I can't guarantee what a court will decide. Nobody ever can."