

SAF Urged to let First Generations PRs Contribute as Volunteers

The Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS) says the Singapore Armed Forces should seriously consider making provisions for first-generation Permanent Residents to contribute as volunteers.

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SINGAPORE: The Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS) said the Singapore Armed Forces should seriously consider making provisions for first-generation Permanent Residents (PRs) to contribute as volunteers.

It was responding to a survey on National Service conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

In the survey, the majority of Singaporeans said they are receptive to first-generation PRs contributing to defence as volunteers.

The committee which is reviewing the support network around National Service met at the Home Team Academy on Tuesday.

Committee members were briefed by IPS on the findings of the recent survey.

The survey showed two-thirds of Singaporeans are supportive of first-generation PRs to contribute as volunteers in the defence of Singapore.

However, only less than half say first-generation PRs should serve the two-year full time National Service.

CSNS' steering committee member, Dr Lim Wee Kiak, said: "What you realise from this survey is that majority are not asking them to serve the same two years system. In fact, serving the same two years system is a privilege. I'm glad that many people realise that, and that should be a privilege that belongs to Singaporeans. So far as PRs, they acknowledge that 'Yes, we should give them the opportunity to serve but let them serve in a volunteer basis'."

The committee also felt there is a disconnection in the perception of how employers are supporting National Service.

The IPS survey showed that more than four out of five servicemen said employers are supportive of their In-Camp Training.

However, two out of five servicemen pointed out that employers prefer to hire people who do not have National Service commitments.

Wong Wei Peng, steering committee member in CSNS, said: "For companies, our objective is very clear - maximise profits. Sometimes, depending on individual companies they might choose to have preference over others who pose less of a challenge in terms of work arrangements. I find that not hard to accept.

"I think the challenge right now moving forward is how to mitigate that kind of challenges in a way that we find a right balance."

Dr Lim said a ground-up approach is needed.

He said: "There are a lot of suggestions that are coming forward. Some of which we consider transactional, in the sense that if you do this, then I will give you this. I think what we are trying to do is to avoid that.

"We are hoping for more ground-up initiatives like Burger King offering special deals for NSmen. We hope this will be a ground up approach rather than something which is government driven."

The committee said more engagement with employers is needed to get a better buy-in from them on National Service. The key thing is to look at what their concerns are and how to encourage more employers to be National Service-friendly.

In the IPS survey, 98 per cent of respondents regarded National Service as necessary, providing security for the country.

The committee said the report reaffirmed the belief that National Service is a well-supported institution among the population.