



Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Office of the Attorney General

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For Immediate Release

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Joint Press Release

CNMI Office of the Attorney General and Northern Marianas College work together to comply with federal student aid requirements for online students

Attorney General Edward Manibusan and Consumer Counsel Michele Harris recently met with Northern Marianas College (NMC) officials to discuss measures for students possibly affected by new federal regulations.

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced that students enrolled in online programs at out-of-state colleges and universities may not be eligible for federal financial aid without a State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is an agreement between member states, districts, and territories that establishes national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs.

The Office of the Attorney General, Office of Consumer Counsel will now oversee a complaint process for CNMI students who are enrolled in online programs at public or private nonprofit colleges and universities that are physically located in other states. This complaint process should bring the CNMI into compliance with the rule published by the U.S. Department of Education.

In addition, NMC is looking at other additional ways they can collaborate with other states to expand access to online programs for CNMI students.

“As the Commonwealth’s consumer protection division, we are delighted to assist our students in receiving the financial aid they need to complete their college education,” stated Attorney General Edward Manibusan.

The Office of Consumer Counsel will oversee student complaints and other related matters. Effective September 2019, students enrolled in out-of-state online college programs can file complaints online at www.cnmioag.org, or call the Office of the Attorney General Office of Consumer Counsel, at (670) 237-7500. The complaint process applies to any and all complaints, including complaints about actions or events that occurred prior to today’s announcement.

The Office of Consumer Counsel will evaluate complaints, identify the appropriate accrediting agency or governmental entity to handle the complaint, and request a response from the entity regarding the final disposition of the complaint. If no response is received, the Office will follow up with the agency to which the complaint was referred to determine the resolution, and if necessary, determine whether additional referrals are warranted.

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