



The Senate
NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
P.O. BOX 500129
SAIPAN, MP 96950

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 24-

81

Date: March 18, 2026

RE: Senate Bill No. 24-55

Honorable Karl R. King-Nabors
President of the Senate
Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas
Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Mister President:

Your Committee on Judiciary, Government and Law, to which was referred Senate Bill No. 24-55, entitled:

"To amend Title 9, Division 5 of the Commonwealth Code to establish "Higher Fine Zones," imposing increased penalties for traffic violations within designated areas such as school zones, construction zones, and other high-risk areas; and for other purposes also known as the Patrick Henry Camacho Castro Act."

begs leave to report as follows:

I. RECOMMENDATION:

After considerable discussion and deliberation, your Committee recommends passage of Senate Bill No. 24-55 in its current form.

II. ANALYSIS:

A) Purpose:

The purpose of Senate Bill No. 24-55 is to deter dangerous driving behaviors, protect vulnerable individuals like children and workers, and strengthen enforcement by establishing higher traffic fine zones in high-risk areas such as school and construction zones.

B) Committee Findings:

Your Committee finds that dangerous driving behaviors, including speeding and other moving violations, in school zones, construction zones, and other high-risk areas pose a serious threat to public safety, particularly to children, pedestrians, and workers, highlighting the need for policies to ensure safer roadways.

Your Committee finds that Patrick Henry Camacho Castro, who was fatally struck by a motorist on October 4, 2025, in Sadog Tâsi, Saipan, an area with a high rate of traffic accidents. The proposed legislation is named in his memory to highlight the consequences of reckless driving and the need for stronger deterrence.

Your Committee further finds that jurisdictions such as Hawaii, Florida, and Washington, D.C. have implemented “Higher Fine Zones” to deter unsafe driving and protect the public. Accordingly, the proposed legislation establishes higher fine zones within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to deter reckless driving, promote safety, and strengthen enforcement in areas with the greatest exposure to traffic hazards.

Your Committee met on March 18, 2026 to discuss the provisions of the proposed legislation. During discussion, it was expressed that the proposed legislation is supported as a positive step; however, its effectiveness depends on consistent and proactive enforcement. Emphasis was placed on the need for law enforcement agencies, including officers under the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Alcoholic Beverage and Tobacco Control (ABTC) Officers under the Department of Commerce, to actively address traffic violations and DUI-related incidents across all areas, not limited to school zones.

Your Committee extended its appreciation to the House of Representatives' passage of Senate Bill No. 24-19 which removes the legal status requirement for obtaining a driver's license and instead allows any individual who can prove residency in the CNMI to qualify. It was expressed that if enacted, all vehicle operators should obtain a valid driver's license, purchase vehicles with proper insurance, and comply with traffic laws. It was stated that it is the sole responsibility of DPS to ensure motorists are licensed, insured, and properly registered, and to strengthen enforcement through measures such as road stops, sobriety checks, and license and registration inspections. Improved compliance and enforcement would enhance safety for both motorists and pedestrians, particularly in light of recent fatal accidents. Furthermore, your Committee suggested that revenues from fines could be used to improve roadway safety through better signage, pedestrian crossings, and enhanced lighting in high-risk areas.

Your Committee agrees with the provisions entailed in the proposed legislation and no member objected to the passage of Senate Bill No. 24-55 in its current form.

C) Legislative History:

Senate Bill No. 24-55 was formally introduced by Senator Celina R. Babauta on December 19, 2025. On January 13, 2026 Senate Bill No. 24-55 was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Judiciary, Government and Law for disposition.

D) Public Hearing and Comment:

1. Public Hearing. No public hearing was scheduled for Senate Bill No. 24-55. However, a committee meeting, which is open to the public, was held to receive written and oral testimonies on any proposed legislation appearing on the agenda. See below for further details.
2. Committee Meeting. The proposed legislation made its first appearance during the scheduled committee meeting on March 18, 2026, in which your Committee deliberated on the provisions stated in the proposed legislation and the comments provided to the Committee for review.

The respective Committee Meeting notices and agendas were officially posted on various legislative forums and social media sites in accordance with the Open Government Act to invite members of the general public to provide comments as indicated under Item No. III. Public Comment of the Committee Agenda. During the committee meetings, no public comments were provided on the proposed legislation.

3. Written Comment. To date, the status of comments received from the following government agencies are as follows:

1. Honorable Alexandro C. Castro, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, *letter dated February 02, 2026*

E) Estimated Fiscal Cost:

The enactment of Senate Bill No. 24-55 may result in additional costs to the CNMI government as there may be initial costs associated with the designation of Higher Fine Zones, installation of official signage, and potential acquisition or deployment of automated enforcement technologies by the Department of Public Safety, these costs may be offset by increased fine revenues generated from enhanced penalties.

F) Summary of Committee Amendments:

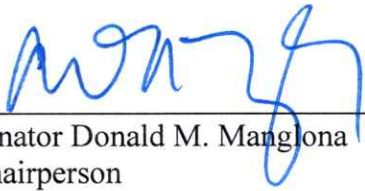
Your Committee agreed that no further amendments were needed.



III. CONCLUSION:

Your Committee agrees with the intent and purpose of the proposed legislation and recommends the passage of Senate Bill No. 24-55 in its current form.

Respectfully submitted,



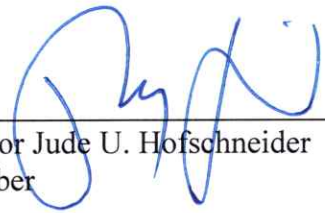
Senator Donald M. Mangiona
Chairperson



Senator Manny Gregory T. Castro
Vice Chairperson

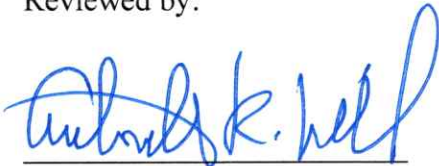
Senator Celina R. Babauta
Member


Senator Francisco Q. Cruz
Member

Senator Ronnie M. Calvo
Member


Senator Jude U. Hofschneider
Member

Reviewed by:



Senate Legal Counsel

Attachments:

- Honorable Alexandro C. Castro, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, *letter dated February 02, 2026*

TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

Second Regular SESSION, 2025

S. B. No. 24-55

A BILL FOR AN ACT

To amend Title 9, Division 5 of the Commonwealth Code to establish "Higher Fine Zones," imposing increased penalties for traffic violations within designated areas such as school zones, construction zones, and other high-risk areas; and for other purposes also known as the Patrick Henry Camacho Castro Act.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:

1 **Section 1. Short Title.** This Act may be cited as the "Higher Fine Zone Act of
2 2025," also known as the "*Patrick Henry Camacho Castro Act*".

3 **Section 2. Findings and Purpose.** The Legislature finds that dangerous driving
4 behavior, including speeding and other moving violations, in school zones, construction
5 zones, and other areas of heightened risk poses a serious threat to public safety. Children,
6 pedestrians, and workers are particularly vulnerable in these areas. It is critical to
7 implement policies to provide safer roadways and streets for our citizens.

8 The Legislature recognizes *Patrick Henry Camacho Castro*, who was tragically
9 killed by a motorist on October 4, 2025, in Sadog Tâsi, Saipan, an area known for its high
10 rate of traffic accidents. This Act is named in his memory to serve as a solemn reminder of
11 the devastating consequences of reckless driving and the urgent need for stricter deterrents
12 within our roadways.

13 The Legislature further finds that other jurisdictions, such as Hawaii, Florida, and
14 Washington, D.C., have successfully implemented "Higher Fine Zones," where traffic
15 fines are increased to deter such behavior and protect the public. Accordingly, the purpose
16 of this Act is to establish higher fine zones within the Commonwealth of the Northern
17 Mariana Islands (CNMI) to deter reckless driving, promote safety, and strengthen
18 enforcement in areas where public exposure to traffic hazards is greatest.

1 **Section 3. Amendment.** Title 9, Division 5 of the Commonwealth Code is hereby
2 amended by adding a new chapter 11 to read as follows:

3 **“Chapter 11. Higher Fine Zones.**

4 **§ 101. Short Title.** This chapter may be cited as the “Higher Fine Zone Act of
5 2025,” also known as the “Patrick Henry Camacho Castro Act”.

6 **§ 102. Codification and Definitions.** Subject to the codification of this Act in
7 Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 11 of the Commonwealth Code, and to be construed in *pari*
8 *materia* with existing traffic laws and regulations of the Commonwealth, the following
9 definitions apply for the purposes of this chapter:

10 (a) “Construction Zone” means any area on or adjacent to a roadway where
11 construction, repair, or maintenance work is being performed, designated by the
12 Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Department of Public Works (DPW).

13 (b) “Higher Fine Zone” means an area designated by the DPS where increased
14 penalties apply for violations of traffic laws under this chapter, including but not limited to
15 school zones, construction zones, and high-risk areas.

16 (c) “High-Risk Area” means any roadway or location designated by DPS where
17 conditions, traffic volume, decreased visibility, pedestrian activity, or prior accident history
18 indicate a significantly increased potential for traffic-related injury or danger to the public.
19 Such areas may include but are not limited to school crossings, hospital approaches,
20 recreational parks, or heavily trafficked pedestrian corridors.

21 (d) “Official Signage” means posted traffic signs approved by DPS clearly
22 indicating the start and end of a Higher Fine Zone and stating that fines are increased within
23 the zone.

24 (e) “School Zone” means the area surrounding a school or educational facility
25 where children are likely to cross or walk along the roadway, as designated by DPS in
26 consultation with the Public School System (PSS).

27 **§ 103. Designation and Signage.**

1 (a) DPS, in coordination with DPW and PSS, shall designate all Higher Fine Zones
2 throughout the Commonwealth, including school zones, construction zones, and high-risk
3 areas.

4 (b) No person shall be subject to increased penalties under this chapter unless the
5 zone is clearly marked with official signage stating:

6 "Higher Fine Zone – Traffic Fines Doubled."

7 (c) DPS may utilize automated enforcement technologies, including radar, safety
8 cameras, or other approved devices, to enforce compliance within these zones.

9 **§ 104. Increased Penalties.**

10 (a) Any person who violates any provision of this chapter within a Higher Fine
11 Zone shall be subject to an increased fine of double the standard fine otherwise prescribed
12 for the same offense.

13 (b) For repeat offenses within a twelve (12)-month period, the following
14 progressive penalties shall apply:

15 (1) First offense: Double the standard fine;

16 (2) Second offense: Triple the standard fine; and

17 (3) Third offense: Triple the standard fine and suspension of driver's license
18 for up to one hundred and eighty (180) days or six (6) months.

19 (c) The court may also impose additional punitive penalties such as community
20 service or mandatory traffic safety education or repeat or egregious violations.

21 **§ 105. Rules and Regulations.** DPS shall promulgate regulations consistent with
22 this chapter within ninety (90) days of the effective date of this Act, including:

23 (a) Criteria for designating Higher Fine Zones;

24 (b) Standards for official signage; and

25 (c) Procedures for enforcement and fine collection."

26 **Section 4. Severability.** If any provision of this Act or the application of any such
27 provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court of competent
28 jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its provisions to persons or
29 circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid shall not be affected thereby.

1 **Section 5. Savings Clause.** This Act and any repealer contained herein shall not
2 be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or acquired under
3 statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted under the statutes.
4 Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding instituted under or pursuant
5 to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have the effect of terminating, or in any
6 way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal, which shall already be in existence on the
7 date this Act becomes effective.

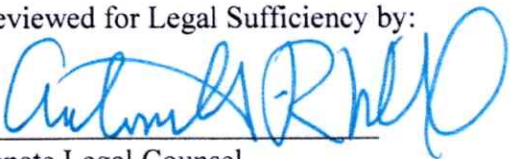
8 **Section 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect immediately upon its approval
9 by the Governor or upon its becoming law without such approval.

Date: 19 Dec 25

Introduced By: 

Senator Celina R. Babauta

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency by:


Senate Legal Counsel



The
JUDICIARY
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

SUPREME COURT

P.O. Box 502165 • Saipan, MP 96950
Guma' Hustisia • Susupe
Tel: (670) 236-9709 • Fax: (670) 236-9702
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ALEXANDRO C. CASTRO
Chief Justice
ACCastro@NMIJudiciary.gov

February 2, 2026

The Honorable Donald M. Manglona
Chairman, Senate Standing Committee on Judiciary, Government, and Law
Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950

Re: Judiciary Comments on House Bill No. 24-59 and Senate Bills 24-37, 24-53, and 24-55

Dear Chairman Manglona:

We write in response to your letter requesting for comments on House Bill No. 24-59 and Senate Bills 24-37, 24-53, and 24-55. Keeping with past practice, the Judiciary will submit comments or recommendations on proposed legislation that affects the functions and operations of the third branch of government. Here, as House Bill No. 24-59 and Senate Bills 24-53 and 24-55 affect the substance of the law, the Judiciary will refrain from commenting on these bills. Additionally, the Judiciary fully supports the passage of Senate Bill No. 24-37 which will amend the authority for compliance officers to staff treatment programs in the Judiciary.

Through the passage of Senate Bill No. 24-37, the Judiciary will be better equipped to serve participants in its existing treatment court programs, as well as future programs. Due to the success of the Drug Court program and Mental Health Court Docket, the Judiciary foresees the expansion of additional treatment courts that continue to focus on alternative, evidence-based practices. Because of the nature of treatment court programs, there is a strong need for close supervision of participants. Close supervision supports a treatment court participant's progress by providing early intervention and deterring non-compliant behavior. In the course of delivering these services, compliance officers sometimes encounter potentially dangerous situations. The establishment of statutory authority for compliance officers to serve as law enforcement officers will significantly enhance the effectiveness of these programs by providing the authority to carry firearms and make arrests as required by law. For these reasons, the Judiciary supports the passage of Senate Bill No. 24-37.

At this time, the Judiciary would also like to note its support for House Bill No. 24-39, which aims to "establish Treatment Program Enforcement Officers within the Judiciary to carry out enforcement, supervision, and monitoring functions essential to the success of court-supervised treatment programs, and to ensure that these officers are fully recognized as law enforcement personnel under Commonwealth law." While Senate Bill No. 24-37 and House Bill No. 24-39 ultimately aim to achieve the same outcome of better equipping treatment court officers, the Judiciary prefers the structure of House Bill No. 24-39 as it better aligns with the organizational needs of the Judiciary.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters. We look forward to continuing to work with your office on matters affecting the Judiciary in this 24th Commonwealth Legislature.

Letter to Senate Chairman Donald M. Manglona
February 2, 2026
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Si Yu'us Ma'dse and Olomwaay,



ALEXANDER C. CASTRO
Chief Justice

cc: Associate Justice John A. Manglona
Associate Justice Perry B. Inos
Presiding Judge Roberto C. Naraja
Associate Judge Kenneth L. Govendo
Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho
Associate Judge Teresa K. Kim-Tenorio
Associate Judge Lillian A. Tenorio