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

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 24-84
Date: March 18, 2026
RE: House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1

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 House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1, entitled:

> "*To create a new criminal defense for Desecration or Theft of Memorial or Historical Sites.*"

begs leave to report as follows:

I. RECOMMENDATION:

After considerable discussion and deliberation, your Committee recommends passage of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1 in its current form.

II. ANALYSIS:

A) Purpose:

The purpose of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1 is to provide stronger legal protection for the Commonwealth's cultural and international landmarks by establishing a specific criminal offense for the desecration or theft of memorials and historical sites.

B) Committee Findings:

Your Committee finds that memorials, historic landmarks, and commemorative structures are vital symbols of cultural identity, peace, and international goodwill. Your Committee notes that recent acts, such as the theft and vandalism of the Korean Peace Memorial, are more than simple property crimes; they are acts of desecration that damage the Commonwealth's reputation as a respectful place that honors shared history and global relationships.

Your Committee further finds that the current general vandalism statute, 6 CMC § 1805, is inadequate because it fails to distinguish between routine property damage and the profound harm caused by defiling sites of ceremonial or international importance. This lack of legal distinction limits the ability of the courts and prosecutors to respond meaningfully, which may lead to a message of indifference and leave culturally significant sites vulnerable to repeat offenses.

Your Committee finds that there is a dire need to establish a distinct criminal offense with enhanced penalties and mandatory full restitution to ensure that memorials and historical sites receive protection rooted in principle, addressing both the physical destruction and the broader emotional and symbolic harm these crimes inflict on the people of the Marianas.

Your Committee met on March 18, 2026 to discuss the provisions of the proposed legislation. During the discussion, it was highlighted that there were many recommendations for the proposed legislation from the NMI Museum, however, these recommendations were included in the product that was transmitted to the Senate by the House of Representatives. Therefore, no member objected to the passage of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1 in its current form.

C) Legislative History:

House Bill No. 24-43 was formally introduced by Representative Julie M.A. Ogo on July 31, 2025, and was referred to the House Standing Committee on Judicial and Governmental Operations (JGO) for disposition. On October 17, 2025, the House JGO Committee adopted the proposed legislation in the form of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1, which was reported to the full body of the House of Representatives under House Standing Committee Report (SCR) No. 24-38. On November 06, 2025, during the Seventh Day, First Regular Session of the House of Representatives, House SCR 24-38 was adopted, and the House of Representatives passed the proposed legislation in the form of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1. On November 07, 2025, House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1, was transmitted to the Senate and was subsequently 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 House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1. 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 meeting, no public comments were provided on the proposed legislation.

3. Written Comment. Your Committee requested for comments on the proposed legislation. To date, the status of comments received from the following government agencies are as follows:

   1. Sylvan O. Igisomar, Secretary, Department of Lands and Natural Resources, *letter dated January 26, 2026*

E) Estimated Fiscal Cost:

The enactment of House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1 will result in additional costs to the CNMI government as it would require the Historic Preservation Office to post new signage and conduct public awareness outreach. However, the proposed legislation seeks to instill a high mandatory fine up to $100,000 with a full restitution requirement for offenders.

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 House Bill No. 24-43, House Draft 1 in its current form.

Respectfully submitted,

Senator Donald M. Manglona
Chairperson

Senator Manny Gregory T. Castro
Vice Chairperson

Senator Celina R. Babauta
Member

Senator Ronnie M. Calvo
Member

Senator Francisco Q. Cruz
Member

Senator Jude U. Hofschneider
Member

Reviewed by:

Senate Legal Counsel

Attachments:

- Sylvan O. Igisomar, Secretary, Department of Lands and Natural Resources, *letter dated January 26, 2026*

TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 31, 2025

Fifth Special Session, 2025 **H. B. 24-43, HD1**

A BILL FOR AN ACT

To create a new criminal offense for Desecration, Theft, or Attempted Sale of Stolen Memorials, Historical or Cultural Sites, and Property.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE 24TH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:

Section 1. Findings and Purpose. Sites of remembrance, reconciliation, and cultural identity—such as public memorials, historic landmarks, ~~and~~ commemorative structures, and cultural structures—hold deep meaning for the people of the Commonwealth and for visitors who share in our history. These places are not only local heritage sites; they are enduring symbols of peace, sacrifice, resilience, perseverance, and international goodwill. The recent theft and vandalism of the Korean Peace Memorial bust of Mr. Yong Taek Lee—a revered representation of friendship between the CNMI and the Republic of Korea—and other similar acts at historical or tourist sites are not merely property crimes. They are acts of desecration that diminish the Marianas' standing as a safe and respectful place—one that honors the sacrifices made here and the relationships those sites were built to represent.

In its current form, the CNMI's general vandalism statute—6 CMC § 1805—fails to capture the distinct and compounded harm caused when memorials or culturally significant sites are defiled. While the statute criminalizes property damage, it draws no distinction between routine vandalism—such as graffiti or minor destruction, and acts of disrespect and malice—and the desecration of structures that carry ceremonial, symbolic, or local and international importance. This lack of legal recognition leaves prosecutors and courts without the tools to reflect the full gravity of such acts. As a result, the Commonwealth's ability to deter these offenses and respond meaningfully remains limited.

The lack of a specific legal remedy—one that goes beyond merely prosecuting property damage—weakens deterrence and leaves culturally and historically significant sites vulnerable to repeat offenses. When such acts go unpunished or are treated as routine vandalism, the message conveyed is one of indifference. Without a legal distinction that captures the true nature of these violations, we cannot fully confront or correct the harm they cause.

Enactment of this "full force" legislation empowers the Commonwealth to respond decisively to acts that target the sites most sacred to our shared identity. By establishing a distinct criminal offense, imposing enhanced penalties, and requiring full restitution, this Act ensures that such violations are no longer treated as minor offenses. The Legislature affirms that cultural, memorials, and historical sites deserve not only preservation, but protection rooted in principle—protection

that addresses not just the physical damage, but the broader harm these offenses inflict on the image of our islands and our people. These crimes of desecration shall be met with the full force of the law.

Section. 2. Enactment. Title 6, Division 1, Crimes Against Person and Property, Part 2. Crimes Against Property, Chapter 3. Other Property Offenses of the Commonwealth Code is hereby amended by adding the following new section 1806, titled, "Desecration, Theft, or Attempted Sale of Stolen Memorials, Historical or Cultural Sites, and Property" that provides as follows:

"§ 1806. Desecration, Theft, or Attempted Sale of Stolen Memorials, Historical or Cultural Sites, and Property.

Definitions.

Property: Monuments, statues, busts, plaques, structures, ancestral latte stones, lusongs (ancestral mortar stone), signages, or other ancestral objects, materials and artifacts that are significant to a historical and cultural identities and sites.

(a) Offense. A person commits the offense of Desecration, ~~or~~ Theft, or Attempted Sale of Stolen Memorials, Historical or Cultural Sites, and property if they knowingly or intentionally:

(1) Damage, deface, destroy, or desecrate any monument, statue, bust, plaque, structure, ancestral latte stone, lusong (ancestral mortar stone), or signage located at or designated as

a memorial, cultural or historical site;

(2) Steal, remove, or unlawfully possess any component of a memorial, cultural or historical site, including ancestral latte stone, lusong (ancestral mortar stone), statues, sacred items, markers, or artifacts;

(3) Tamper with, paint, spray, urinate on, or defile any portion of such site or property;

(4) Attempt to sell any ancestral latte stone, lusong (ancestral mortar stone), regardless of locality of finding (public or private land);

(5) Unlawful possession ancestral artifacts and other materials that hold cultural significance;

(6) Attempt to sell any monument, statue, bust, plaque, structure, or signage stolen from a site designated as a memorial, cultural or historical. This includes ancestral objects, artifacts and other materials that hold cultural and historical significance;

(7) Aid, abet, or conspire in the commission of any such act.

(b) Designated Protected Sites. This section shall apply to:

(1) Sites registered by the CNMI Historic Preservation Office;

(2) Sites designated by local or municipal governments as war memorials or cultural heritage locations;

(3) Sites established or recognized in partnership with foreign governments or international peace organizations.

(c) Penalty. Any person convicted under this section shall be guilty of a felony and shall be sentenced to:

(1) Imprisonment for not less than five (5) years and up to fifteen (15) years;

(2) A fine of not less than $25,000 and not more than $100,000;

(3) Mandatory full restitution, including the cost of repair, replacement, or recovery of stolen or damaged property;

(4) A written and public apology to the community and any affected international partner or donor;

(5) Four hundred (400) hours of community service, preferably focused on cultural preservation, site restoration, or public education.

(d) Aggravating Circumstances. The court shall impose the maximum sentence under this section if:

(1) The offense involves international memorials or symbols of reconciliation;

(2) The act causes permanent or irreparable damage;

(3) The offense was committed with hate, malice, or commercial intent;

(4) The offender has a prior conviction under this section.

(e) Juvenile Offenders. For offenders under the age of eighteen (18):

(1) The minor shall be subject to court-ordered rehabilitative cultural education, in addition to restitution and community service;

(2) Parent(s) or legal guardian(s) shall be jointly liable for restitution.

Section 3. Enactment. Subject to codification by the CNMI Law Revision Commission, the following provision shall be enacted into law:

"101. Public Education and Protection.

The Historic Preservation Office, in coordination with the Department of Public Safety and the Marianas Visitors Authority, shall:

(a) Post signage at all memorial and historical sites clearly stating penalties for Title 6 section 1806;

(b) Implement a public awareness campaign to educate residents and tourists about the importance of respecting CNMI heritage;"

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

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

Section 6. Effective Date. This Act shall take effect upon its approval by the Governor, or it becoming law without such approval.

Prefiled: 7/29/2025

Date: _____ Introduced by: /s/ Rep. Julie M. A. Ogo
/s/ Rep. Vincent R. Aldan
/s/ Rep. Roman C. Benavente
/s/ Rep. Angelo A. Camacho
/s/ Rep. Joseph A. Flores
/s/ Rep. Marissa R. Flores
/s/ Rep. Ralph N. Yumul

Reviewed for legal sufficiency by:

/s/ Joseph L.G. Taijeron, Jr.
House Legal Counsel

Date: 7/29/2025

House Draft 1, reviewed for legal sufficiency by:

/s/ Joseph L.G. Taijeron, Jr.
House Legal Counsel

Date: 10/20/2025

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Department of Lands and Natural Resources
Lower Base, P.O. Box 10007
Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 322-9834 Fax: (670) 322-2633

January 29, 2026

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

Dear Senator Manglona,

Thank you for soliciting our comments on HB No. 24-43. We would like to share the following feedback:

The Department supports this bill; however, we believe it does not go far enough. The damage caused by domesticated animals, particularly cows, should also be addressed within this legislation. We propose that animal owners be held liable for any damage their animals cause and be responsible for the consequences of their actions.

Given the challenge of identifying the owners of these animals—especially when they are outside their fenced areas—we recommend adding a provision requiring cattle to be branded for identification purposes. Any livestock found outside their fenced areas that has caused damage to both government and private properties, a month after this bill is enacted, should be auctioned to the highest bidder by the Division of Agriculture Animal Section. The proceeds from these sales should be deposited into a revolving account to benefit the Division of Parks and the Division of Agriculture Animal Section.

Ghilisou,

Sylvan O. Igisomar
Secretary