



COPY

THE SENATE  
Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature  
P. O. Box 500129  
Saipan, MP 96950

May 06, 2026

The Honorable Edmund S. Villagomez  
Speaker  
House of Representatives  
24<sup>th</sup> Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature  
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Speaker Villagomez:

I have the honor of returning with amendments House Bill No. 24-96, entitled, "To appropriate \$960,235.74 in Tobacco Settlement Funds, identified by the Governor as additional funds available for appropriation in Governors Communication (House) 24-103, to the Marianas Visitors Authority for tourism recovery initiatives." The Senate passed on Final Reading H.B. No. 24-96, SD1, entitled, "To appropriate \$960,235.74 in Tobacco Settlement Funds, identified by the Governor as additional funds available for appropriation in Governor's Communication (House) 24-103, by the unanimous vote, in its 1<sup>st</sup> Day, Third Special Session on May 01, 2026.

Sincerely,

Dolores S. Bermudes  
Senate Clerk

Attachment

**Transmitted to HOUSE:**

Received by: FSJ Date: 05-06-2026 Time: 10:58am

**TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH**

**LEGISLATURE**

**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**FEBRUARY 25, 2026**

**Third Regular Session, 2026**

**H. B. 24-96, SD1**

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**A BILL FOR AN ACT**

To appropriate \$960,235.74 in Tobacco Settlement Funds, identified by the Governor as additional funds available for appropriation in Governor's Communication (House) 24-103, ~~to the Marianas Visitors Authority for tourism recovery initiatives.~~

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE 24<sup>TH</sup> NORTHERN MARIANAS  
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1           **Section 1. Findings and Purpose.** Tourism is the cornerstone of the  
2 Commonwealth's private-sector economy and remains directly dependent on  
3 sustained air access, destination competitiveness, and visitor demand. The  
4 Legislature finds that, despite stabilization efforts, the tourism sector continues to  
5 operate under severe constraints, including airline seat capacity well below pre-  
6 pandemic levels, reduced or suspended routes, historically low hotel occupancy  
7 outside limited peak periods, and declining visitor arrivals that closely track airlift  
8 availability.

9           Ongoing structural and external pressures have materially impeded recovery,  
10 including unfavorable exchange rates in core source markets, global aircraft  
11 delivery delays, heightened regional competition driven by aggressive subsidy

1 programs, and aviation market uncertainty affecting carrier deployment decisions.  
2 The Legislature further finds that existing hotel occupancy levels remain far below  
3 estimated break-even thresholds, locally generated revenues such as Hotel  
4 Occupancy Tax collections have declined sharply from pre-pandemic levels, and  
5 these revenue shortfalls have constrained the scale and timing of tourism recovery  
6 efforts.

7 Uninterrupted and reliable air service is the most critical determinant of  
8 tourism performance in the Commonwealth, as evidenced by strong load factors  
9 despite overall capacity reductions. The Legislature finds that strategic airline  
10 incentive support, cooperative marketing programs, and sustained destination  
11 branding are necessary to retain existing service, stabilize frequencies, encourage  
12 seasonal and future expansion, and signal to airline partners that the  
13 Commonwealth is committed to protecting and rebuilding its airlift in a highly  
14 competitive regional environment.

15 The Legislature finds that the Commonwealth is confronting urgent and  
16 competing priorities that require the immediate reallocation of public resources.  
17 Although tourism remains vital to the economy, the Legislature determines that  
18 disaster recovery and the restoration of essential government services must take  
19 precedence where communities have suffered widespread damage.

20 The Legislature finds that Super Typhoon Sinlaku caused significant  
21 destruction throughout the First, Second, and Third Senatorial Districts, disrupting

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1 municipal operations, damaging public infrastructure, and impairing local  
2 governments' ability to provide essential services. Without immediate financial  
3 assistance, recovery efforts will be delayed, prolonging hardship for affected  
4 residents.

5 The Legislature further finds that it is necessary and appropriate to redirect  
6 a portion of the funds previously identified for tourism-related purposes to address  
7 these urgent recovery needs. Such action reflects the Commonwealth's  
8 responsibility to prioritize public safety, community stability, and the restoration of  
9 government functions.

10 The Legislature additionally affirms its constitutional obligation under  
11 Article XV, Section 1(e) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern  
12 Mariana Islands to provide funding to the Public School System, particularly in  
13 times when disaster impacts threaten the continuity of education.

14 Responding to these conditions, the purpose of this Act is to appropriate  
15 \$960,235.74 in Tobacco Settlement Funds, identified by the Governor as additional  
16 funds available for appropriation from outside sources, in Governor's  
17 Communication (House) 24-103, to the Marianas Visitors Authority for tourism  
18 recovery efforts, to support the recovery and operational needs of the First, Second,  
19 and Third Senatorial Districts, and to allocate twenty-five percent (25%) of the total  
20 appropriation to the Public School System in accordance with constitutional  
21 requirements.

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1           **Section 2. Appropriation.** Notwithstanding any laws, rules, or regulations  
2 to the contrary, the Tobacco Settlement Funds in the amount of \$960,235.74 is  
3 hereby appropriated as follows:

4           (a)       \$240,058.94 to the CNMI Public School System (PSS). The  
5 expenditure authority shall be the PSS Commissioner. The PSS Commissioner shall  
6 be responsible for reporting all expenses to the Presiding Officers of the Legislature  
7 upon the exhaustion of the funds appropriated under this Act.

8           (b)       \$100,000.00 for activities and programs in the First Senatorial  
9 District, according to an adopted resolution by the Rota Legislative Delegation.

10          (c)       \$100,000.00 for personnel and operations of the Office of the Mayor  
11 of Tinian and Aguiguan, according to an adopted resolution by the Tinian and  
12 Aguiguan Legislative Delegation.

13          (d)       \$100,000.00 for personnel and operations of the Office of the Mayor  
14 of Saipan, according to an adopted resolution by the Saipan and Northern Islands  
15 Legislative Delegation.

16          (e)       \$50,000.00 for the operations of the Legislative Bureau (LB) of the  
17 Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. The expenditure authority shall be  
18 the LB Director. The LB Director shall be responsible for reporting all expenses to  
19 the Presiding Officers of the Legislature upon the exhaustion of the funds  
20 appropriated under this Act.

21          (a)(f)     \$960,235.74 \$370,176.80 shall be allocated to the Marianas Visitors

1 Authority for tourism recovery efforts. The expenditure authority shall be the  
2 Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Marianas Visitors Authority. The  
3 MVA Board of Directors Chairperson shall be responsible for reporting all  
4 expenses to the Presiding Officers of the Legislature upon the exhaustion of the  
5 funds appropriated under this Act.

6 **Section 3. No Fiscal Limitation.** The funds appropriated under Section 2  
7 shall be without fiscal year limitation.

8 **Section 3 4. Severability.** If any provisions of this Act or the application of  
9 any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court  
10 of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its  
11 provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid  
12 shall not be affected thereby.

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

20 **Section 5 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect upon its approval by  
21 the Governor, or it becoming law without such approval.

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Prefiled: 2/13/2026

Date: 2/13/2026

Introduced by: /s/ Rep. Marissa R. Flores

/s/ Rep. Diego V. F. Camacho

/s/ Rep. Thomas J. DLC. Manglona

/s/ Rep. Elias J.M. Rangamar

/s/ Rep. Edmund S. Villagomez

/s/ Rep. Vincent R. Aldan

/s/ Rep. Daniel I. Aquino Jr.

/s/ Rep. Blas Jonathan "BJ" T. Attao

/s/ Rep. Roman C. Benavente

/s/ Rep. Angelo A. Camacho

/s/ Rep. Joel C. Camacho

/s/ Rep. Joseph A. Flores

/s/ Rep. Malcolm J. Omar

/s/ Rep. Raymond U. Palacios

/s/ Rep. John Paul P. Sablan

/s/ Rep. Patrick H. San Nicolas

/s/ Rep. Ralph N. Yumul

/s/ Rep. Julie M.A. Ogo

Reviewed for legal sufficiency by:

/s/ Karie Comstock

House Legal Counsel

Date: 2/12/2026