



HOUSE JOURNAL

SECOND REGULAR SESSION, 2025

13th Day, Second Regular Session

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

The House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature convened its Thirteenth Day, Second Regular Session on Wednesday, December 31, 2025, at 09:16 a.m., in the House Chamber on Capitol Hill, Saipan, Commonwealth Northern Mariana Islands. Upon two-thirds vote of the members present, the session was declared an emergency session in accordance with Rule III, Section 7 of the House Rules.

The Honorable Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez, Speaker of the House, presided.

A moment of silence was observed.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll for attendance with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher Aldan Ada	Present
Representative Vincent Raymond Alda	Present
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.	Present
Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" Tenorio Attao	Present
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Present
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Present
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Present
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Present
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Present
Representative Marissa Renee Flores	Present
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)
Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Present
Representative Malcom Jason Omar	Present
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Present
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Present
Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Present
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	Absent (Excused)
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Present
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Present
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Absent (Excused)

¹ Members participating electronically were connected via Microsoft Teams in accordance with Rule IV, Section 1 of the Official Rules of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth Legislature, which permits members to appear, participate, and vote electronically through telephone, video, internet, or other electronic means, provided that the member is physically present within the Commonwealth.

Clerk Linda B. Muña: Mr. Speaker, we have 17 members present and 3 members absent.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villgomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 17 members present, that constitutes a quorum. Let the record reflect that Representatives Thomas Manglona, Patrick San Nicolas, and Ralph Yumul are excused for today's session. We now proceed to Item No. 2, Public Comments. The podium is open to receive any comments. Please state your name and the entity you represent, you have five minutes. If you have statements, please submit them to the Sergeant-at-Arms for forwarding to the Clerk's office.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public Comments was presented by one individual on the following item:

H. B. NO. 24-82: To amend Section 704(k) of Public Law 24-20 to prevent disruption or delay of allotments, payments, or expenditures of the Legislative Branch by adding a transition period of up to 270 days for the implementation of the Legislature's Finance Department; and for other purposes.

There being no further public comments presented, the Chair called for recess.

The House recessed at 9:27 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 9:32 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Before we went on recess, we were under Public Comments. We went on recess to get a copy of the Attorney General's opinion. We will proceed with the agenda while they process that. There being no item under Item No. 3, Adoption of Journals, we now proceed to Item No. 4, Introduction of Bills, and I recognize Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan under House Bills.

ADOPTION OF JOURNALS

None

INTRODUCTIONS OF BILLS

House Bills:

Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan formally introduced the following bill; subsequently requested that it be placed on the Bill Calendar:

H. B. NO. 24-82: To amend Section 704(k) of Public Law 24-20 to prevent disruption or delay of allotments, payments, or expenditures of the Legislative Branch by adding a transition period of up to 270 days for the implementation of the Legislature's Finance Department; and for other purposes. **Prefiled by: REP.**

JOHN PAUL P. SABLAN of Saipan, Precinct 2 (*for himself, Representatives Roy Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Angelo A. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Malcolm J. Omar, Edmund S. Villagomez, and Denita Kaipat Yangetmai*)

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved to suspend Rule IX, Section 8.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the motion to suspend Rule IX, Section 8 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

There being no items under House Local Bills, House Legislative Initiatives, and Item No. 5, Introduction of Resolutions, through Item No. 15, Resolution Calendar, the Chair proceeded to Item No. 16, Bill Calendar, and recognized the Floor Leader.

House Local Bills:

None

House Legislative Initiatives:

None

INTRODUCTIONS OF RESOLUTIONS

House Resolutions:

None

House Joint Resolutions:

None

House Commemorative Resolutions:

None

House Concurrent Resolutions:

None

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

None

SENATE COMMUNICATIONS

None

HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS

None

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

None

COMMUNICATIONS FROM DEPARTMENTS & AGENCIES

None

MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICAITONS

None

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

None

REPORTS OF SPECIAL AND CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

RESOLUTION CALENDAR

None

BILL CALENDAR

The Floor Leader moved to suspend Rule VII, Section 9 and, Rule IX, Sections 9 and 10.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the motion to suspend Rule VII, Section 9 and, Rule IX, Sections 9 and 10 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved for the passage on First and Final Reading of H. B. No. 24-82:

H. B. NO. 24-82: To amend Section 704(k) of Public Law 24-20 to prevent disruption or delay of allotments, payments, or expenditures of the Legislative Branch by adding a transition period of up to 270 days for the implementation of the Legislature’s Finance Department; and for other purposes.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion and recognized Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan.

Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, I would like to offer a floor amendment to change the numbers “270” to “273: to reflect from today to the end of the fiscal year, which is 273 days. I move to amend the numbers “270” in the title on page 1, on page 2, lines 10 and 18, and on page 3, lines 6 and 7. So offered.

The motion was seconded; the Chair called for recess.

The House recessed at 9:38 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 9:44 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Before we went on recess, we were under discussion. Representative John Paul Sablan offered a floor amendment to House Bill No. 24-82, amending the number of days from “270” to “273” on the affected parts of the bill. Everybody has a copy, and it has been seconded. Are there any further discussions?

There being no further discussion on the floor, the motion to accept the floor amendment to H. B. No. 24-82 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair proceeded to the main motion of H. B. No. 24-82, HD1 and opened the floor for discussions.

The Chair recognized Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan.

Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. We are here today in this emergency session because of the memo that was sent to our Director of the Legislative Bureau from the Secretary of Finance calling for the suspension of our allotments to the Legislature as we proceed in forming our Finance Division or Department here in the Legislative Branch. This is why we are here today, to amend Public Law 24-20. To avoid any disruption and delay of our allotments, payments, and expenditures of the Legislative Branch. I ask you all here for your support today. I have spoken with the Senate President and they are also calling for an emergency session at 11:00 a.m. this morning. We are here to address the concerns

and continue providing services to our dear people of the Commonwealth here in the Legislative Branch. Thank you, members.

The Chair recognized Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and esteemed colleagues. I rise also in support of the amendment to Public Law 24-20, Section 704(k). I do so in the spirit of cooperation and partnership amongst our co-equal branches of government. Section 704(k) clarifies that the Legislature has control over its finances and procurement. Importantly, this section does not exempt the Department of Finance from performing or assisting with payroll and payment processing. The purpose of 704(k) is to establish legislative authority over financial decision making, not to remove existing ministerial duties that ensure laws are properly executed and public accountability is maintained. The CNMI constitution established 3 separate but equal branches of government. Article 2 vests legislative authority in the Legislature, including the power to enact laws, governing internal operations, appropriations, and expenditures. Article 3 charges the Executive Branch with faithfully executing the laws. Article 10, Section 8 provides the Department of Finance with oversight responsibilities regarding the expenditure of public funds. These provisions ensure the balance of powers where each branch respects the lawful role of the others. Even though the legislature has separate accounts and control over its appropriations and procurement, this does not negate the fiduciary responsibilities of the Department of Finance. The Secretary of Finance continues to have a fiduciary duty to ensure lawful payroll and payments are processed accurately and on time. Any attempt to refuse or withhold these duties would be considered ultra vires, meaning beyond the powers granted by law and could expose the department to administrative or legal liability. This principle is reinforced by established legal precedent. As established in *Marberry versus Madison*, public officers are required to perform duties directed by law. As established in *Marbury versus Madison*, public officers are required to perform duties directed by law and may not refuse lawful disbursements. Similarly, in *Kendall v. United States*, the Secretary of the Treasury could not refuse to disburse funds lawfully appropriated by Congress. In our local jurisdiction, the CNMI Superior Court in *Reyes versus Reyes* emphasized that one branch of government may not dominate another's constitutional authority, reinforcing the separation of powers doctrine. Furthermore, the CNMI Supreme Court has the constitutional authority to issue writs, including writs of mandamus, to compel public officers to perform duties required by law. These local principles mirror the U.S. Supreme Court rulings in *Marbury versus Madison* and *Kendall versus United States*, confirming that officials cannot refuse to perform clear lawful duties. In practice, we have already seen the importance of this clarity. While payroll and independent contracts for the Legislature were successfully processed yesterday, prior to the enactment of Section 704(k) on January 1, 2026, there were actions that appeared to limit assistance to the Legislature. Although the law was not yet in effect, this demonstrates the importance of establishing a clear legal framework and fostering cooperation between the Legislature and the Department of Finance. While the Secretary of Finance may feel like she is operating on a perceived timeline, the law allows the Legislature to assume full responsibility at its own pace, with the Department of Finance support continuing until the necessary staff and frameworks are in place. We also recognize the thoughtful intentions of Governor Apatang, who has consistently emphasized the need for continuity, accountability, and careful stewardship of public funds. His concerns reflect the shared interest of all branches in maintaining effective governance and serving the people of the Commonwealth. During this

transition, the Legislature is committed to planning, staffing, and preparing internal procedures to ensure financial and procurement operations run smoothly. Even small examples, such as uninterrupted payroll and timely contract processing, demonstrate the tangible benefits of a well-coordinated approach. The inclusion of a transition period is a helpful and constructive measure. While it may not be strictly necessary—the law is already clear and consistent with the separation of powers—this period allows for planning, coordination, and dialogue to ensure responsibilities are managed smoothly. Additionally, this amendment underscores clarity, accountability, and collaboration. It allows the Legislature to exercise control over appropriations while maintaining the fiduciary and ministerial functions of the Department of Finance. This approach upholds constitutional principles, protects public funds, and ensures efficient government operations. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, this amendment promotes clarity, continuity, and collaboration. It addresses potential ambiguities, ensures all branches understand their lawful roles, and prevents ultra vires actions that could disrupt operations. The Legislature remains committed to working closely with the Governor and the Department of Finance to implement the law efficiently, respectfully, and in full compliance with constitutional and statutory requirements, for the benefit of the people of the Commonwealth. Let us move forward in a spirit of cooperation, recognizing that strong governance and accountability benefit not only our institutions but every resident and visitor to our Commonwealth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield.

There being no further discussion on the floor, the Chair recognized the Clerk to call the roll for vote.

The Clerk called the roll on the motion on the passage of H. B. No. 24-82, House Draft 1, First and Final Reading, with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher Aldan Ada	Yes
Representative Vincent Raymond Alda	Yes
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.	Yes
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao	Yes
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Yes
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Yes
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Yes
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Yes
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Yes
Representative Marissa Renee Flores	Yes
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)
Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Yes
Representative Malcom Jason Omar	Yes
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Yes
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Yes
Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Yes
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	Absent (Excused)
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Yes
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Yes
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Absent (Excused)

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Clerk Linda B. Muña: Mr. Speaker, all 17 members present voted “yes.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villgomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 17 members present voting “yes,” House Bill No. 24-82, House Draft 1 hereby passes the House. Thank you, colleagues. We now proceed to Item No. 17, Miscellaneous Business, and the floor is open.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

There being no discussion on the floor, the Chair proceeded to Item No. 18, Announcements, and opened the floor for discussion.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There being no discussion on the floor, the Chair proceeded to Adjournment and recognized the Floor Leader.

ADJOURNMENT

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby move to adjourn subject to the call of the Chair. So move.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the motion for adjournment was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The House adjourned at 09:54 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brendalyn T. Santos
House Journal Clerk

APPEARANCE OF LOCAL BILLS

FIRST LEGISLATIVE DAY: 1st Legislative appearance of a local bill is on the day it is introduced.

SECOND LEGISLATIVE DAY:

THIRD LEGISLATIVE DAY:

Appearance of Measures introduced on the House Floor during the House Session on December 5, 2026:

H. RES. NO. 24-23: To express the profound gratitude and commendation of the House of Representatives to Mrs. Jacqueline Ayuyu Quitugua for her extraordinary career spanning over 44 years, marked by unwavering dedication and transformative contributions to the education, well-being, and development of the youth and school communities in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, as she dawns her well-deserved retirement. REP. EDMUND S. VILLAGOMEZ of Saipan, Precinct 3, (for himself, Representatives Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Joel C. Camacho, Marissa R. Flores, and John Paul P. Sablan; and the Committee of the Whole House) Action: Introduced on December 29, 2025; placed on the Resolution Calendar; and adopted without amendments.