



OFFICE OF SENATOR
Eulogio Shawn Gumataotao

38th Guam Legislature | *I Mina'trentai Ocho Na Liheslaturan Guåhan*

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 8:51 am, Feb 19, 2025

Dear Secretary Noem,

Håfa adai! Greetings and congratulations on your recent confirmation as the Eighth Secretary of Homeland Security.

I am writing to respectfully request your consideration for the expansion of the Guam-Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Visa Waiver Program, particularly the inclusion of the Philippines. With our shared history under Spanish and American governance, Guam and the Philippines have remained closely connected through the thousands of Filipinos who continue to migrate, work, and contribute to the social and economic development of our U.S. Territory. Guam is home to 153,836 residents including 44,793 or 29.1% of our total population who are of Filipino descent.

If approved, including the Philippines in the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program will help our local tourism industry stabilize and do much to help our economy recover from the adverse impacts left behind by the COVID-19 global pandemic. At the time of this writing, Guam welcomed only 739,145 visitors in calendar year 2024 compared to 1,664,934 in 2019. Of the 17 countries where our guests originated from during calendar years 2019 and 2024, visitor arrivals from the Philippines ranked in the top 6 and top 4, respectively.

To summarize the importance of our tourism industry to Guam's broader economy, a December 2024 report from the Guam Visitors Bureau found that tourism had comprised 60% of Guam's economy, generating \$2.4 billion in economic impact, \$250 million in taxes, and supporting 21,000 jobs – until the pandemic. The report further noted that just as Guam tourism was restarting, Typhoon Mawar hit Guam in May 2023 halting recovery. Adding to the challenges, the Japanese yen fell to a 34-year low in April 2024 which has further added to the economic issues facing greater Micronesia.

The expansion of the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program is not only an important part of Guam's broader tourism recovery plan, but also an idea that must run parallel with other policy proposals that aim to support existing businesses and attract new industries. Consistent with a commitment that I made during the 2024 election to introduce legislation restoring the Guam Business Privilege Tax (BPT) to 4% from the current rate of 5%, I introduced Bill No. 11-38 (COR) a few

weeks ago and will continue to collaborate with stakeholders on ways to reduce the cost of doing business in Guam while delivering much-needed financial relief to island residents.

Secretary Noem, my request to expand the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program is built on the good work that was initiated in recent years by the Honorable James Moylan, Guam's Delegate to Congress, and the Guam Legislature. Congressman Moylan continues to actively engage with relevant Federal agencies to include the Philippines in the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program – and allow for Medicare portability for beneficiaries who travel or relocate to the Philippines and require healthcare services while abroad.

Approved by all 15 members of the Guam Legislature, Resolution No. 14-37 recognized and supported the need for a Guam-CNMI visa waiver for the Philippines in order to grow Guam's tourism base, help boost our economic recovery, and capture more of the tourism market from the Philippines.

With the future of Guam's tourism industry and the livelihood of countless families across this patriotic American community at stake, I seek your favorable consideration of my request.

Please accept my gratitude in advance for your time and attention regarding this important matter to the people of Guam.

Sincerely,



SHAWN GUMATAOG TAO

Chairman

Committee on Public Safety, Emergency Management,
and Guam National Guard

cc: Governor of Guam
Guam Delegate to Congress
Senators, *Mina' Trentai Ocho na Liheslaturan Guåhan*