

January 23, 2017; New Family Laws

On January 2, 2017, the 33rd Guam Legislature ended its two-year term. During its tenure, the 33rd Legislature passed 236 laws. Of these, I identified about 20 that I feel impact family life in some fashion. Because laws are sometimes passed with little or no fanfare and people remain in the dark about their existence and/or their specific scope, over the next several columns, I'll review a number of these laws with you. Please pass on this information to others so we are a better informed community.

The first law, Public Law 33-07, established the "First Generation Trust Fund Initiative." Through this scholarship fund, beginning in school year 2018-2019, all graduates of a Guam Department of Education (GDOE) public high school are eligible to receive a \$500 scholarship that can be applied toward registration, enrollment, and tuition fees at either the University of Guam (UOG) or Guam Community College (GCC).

In support of this law, the authors cited some rather sobering statistics from GDOE's 2013-2014 Annual State of Public Education Report. There were approximately 3,300 9th graders enrolled in public schools. Yet, only about 1,800 seniors actually graduated that year. Also of concern to the Legislature was the fact that fewer than 40% of GDOE high school graduates went on to attend UOG or GCC.

In contrast, the National Center of Educational Statistics determined that on average throughout the United States 66% of students who graduated from high school in 2012 subsequently attended post-secondary institutions for two-year or four-year programs of study. Although the Guam statistics seemingly failed to take into consideration the fact that some Guam students attend off-island colleges, there does appear to be a significant gap between Guam's post-secondary school attendance rate compared to the national average.

This situation is compounded by the fact that the educational requirements for available jobs are rapidly increasing. As cited in Public Law 33-07, a Georgetown University Center of Education and the Workforce Report predicts by the year 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some college education. Of these jobs, thirty-five percent will require a Bachelor's degree. Only 35% of available jobs will not require an education beyond high school. In light of these statistics, the Legislature wrote "that the people of Guam need a new strategy to simultaneously increase post-secondary education rates and prepare our young people for a new economy."

The Legislature hopes to achieve these dual goals through the First Generation Trust Fund Initiative. The law requires GDOE to annually notify each public high school student of the available scholarship and the eligibility requirements. To be eligible, an applicant must be a GDOE public school graduate and must enroll in either UOG or GCC.

The Initiative's funds derive from annual mandated contributions from GDOE, UOG, and GCC, as well as private contributions. The special account cannot be commingled with the General Fund and is not subject to the Governor's transfer authority.

Although \$500 represents only a modest contribution toward the total cost of a two or four-year college education, hopefully the Initiative will serve as a significant catalyst to focus the island's attention on the aspirational goal of motivating each student to achieve his or her educational potential.