



COMMITTEE ON

# EDUCATION, LIBRARIES, & PUBLIC BROADCASTING

*I MINA'TRENTAI OCHO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN* GUAM  
CONGRESS  
BUILDING  
*I Liheslaturan Guahan*  
The Guam Legislature

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICE OF SENATOR  
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# APRIL 2025

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH



*Oversight Hearing for GDOE on April 16<sup>th</sup> in the Guam Congress Building*



*Public Hearing for Bills 43, 48 and 68 on April 21<sup>st</sup> in the Guam Congress Building*

### FOCUSING ON EDUCATION AND THE CURRENT CHALLENGES AT GDOE

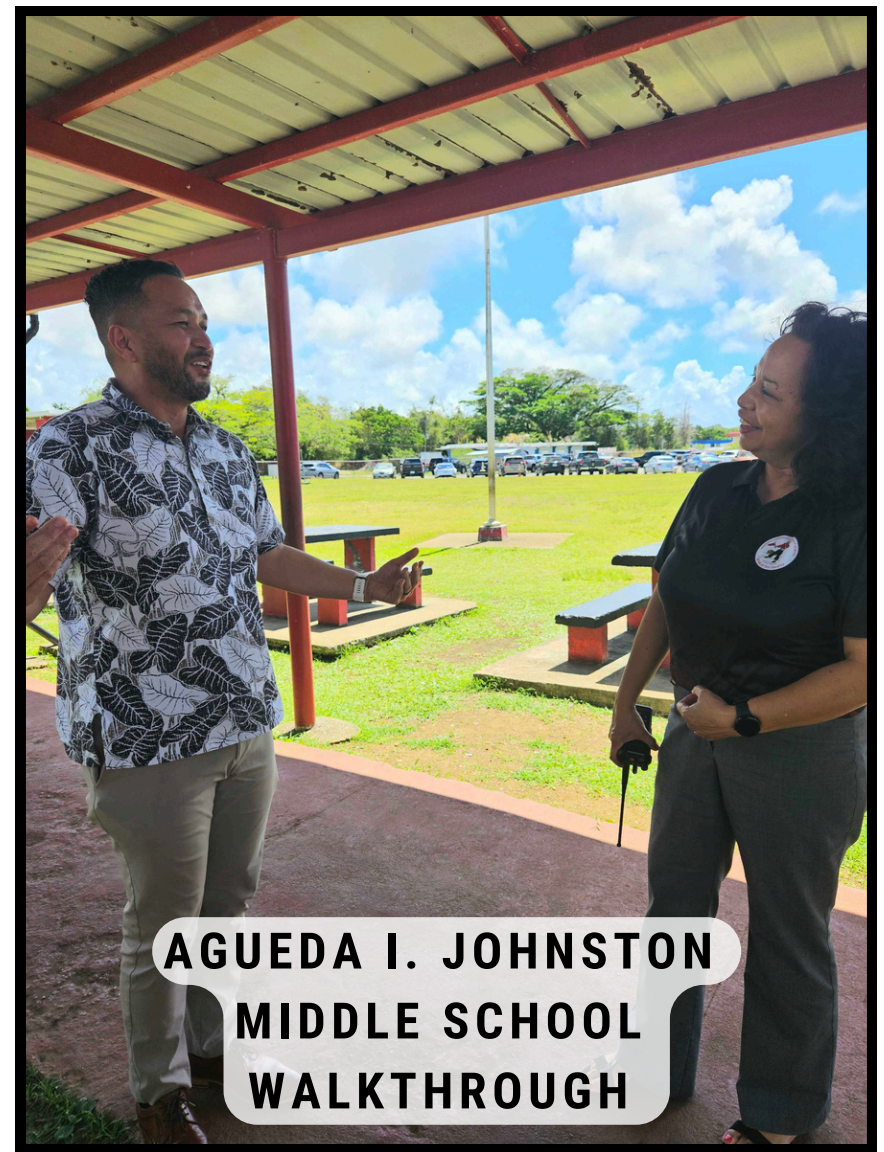
As the school year came to a close and preparations began for the upcoming academic year, important discussions took place during our April oversight and public hearings focused on the critical challenges facing the Guam Department of Education—including school maintenance, teacher shortages, and the ongoing impact of double sessions.

We are especially grateful for the testimonies shared by educators, administrators, and community stakeholders in support of Bill No. 48-38. Their insight is vital in guiding our efforts to get our retired teachers, with their rich experience and dedication, the benefits they deserve when they choose to reenter our classrooms. My colleagues and I will thoughtfully consider their words as we work toward effective, informed solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and schools.



# STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE: A CONVERSATION ON THE TOPIC OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER & AIDE SHORTAGES

The shortage of special education teachers and aides in our schools is an issue that my colleagues and I strive to remedy. I had the privilege of conversing with acting principal Eliza Paulino of Agueda I. Johnston Middle School in regards to the challenges the school and parent community face because of this shortage. Principal Paulino shared her concerns in great detail and proposed possible solutions, helping me gain a better grasp of what must be set into motion to prioritize the unique needs of every student and provide the resources to do so.





# THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW: ISLAND LEADERSHIP DAY AND THE 1<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL HORIZON SUMMIT



*L--R: Senator Vincent A.V. Borja, Charlie Balbastro, Daniel Pangelinan, and Speaker Frank Blas, Jr. during Island Leadership Day*

During this year's Island Leadership Day, I had the privilege of meeting Charlie Balbastro, a senior at Southern High School and member of the Guam Youth Congress. As my student counterpart, Charlie offered thoughtful insights on empowering youth leadership year-round, advocating for more frequent leadership programs and greater inclusivity through the Youth Advisory Council. His passion for public service and commitment to uplifting our island left me truly inspired and hopeful for the future.

I was honored to deliver the Inifresi at the 1st Annual Horizon Summit for youth leadership, hosted by the W.A.V.E. Club, Mane'lu, and the FAS Athletic Club. The summit's focus on cultural pride and self-empowerment reflects the spirit of the Inifresi, and I commend the participating students for their enthusiasm and commitment to personal growth, purpose, and positive change.





# HONORING COMMITMENT TO SECURITY AND VIGILANCE: CERTIFICATION CEREMONY FOR GPD & DOC DRUG DETECTOR DOG HANDLERS

Our island's security has been significantly strengthened through the collaborative efforts of the Guam Customs and Quarantine Agency, Guam Police Department, and Guam Department of Corrections. The introduction of seven highly trained drug detector dogs and their dedicated handlers marks a vital step forward in protecting the safety, health, and wellbeing of our community. I was honored to personally congratulate these courageous and committed individuals whose service plays a crucial role in keeping our island safe.





# CLOSING OUT THE SCHOOL YEAR 2024 - 2025: TOWN HALL MEETING

The strong turnout at the Town Hall meeting at Okkodo High School underscored the urgent need to address critical issues in our schools. For three dedicated hours, we heard from educators, mayors, parents and grandparents, community members and of course, our students about concerns ranging from facility maintenance and double sessions to drug use, violence, and staffing shortages in our schools. The informed testimonies and helpful ideas we received fuel my colleagues and me as we continue to create a plan of action for the school years to come.





# MAY 2025

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH



*Proclamation Signing ceremony for National Bicycle Safety Month on Friday May 2, 2025 at the Governor's Large Conference Room at Adelup.*

### BICYCLE SAFETY MONTH

I was honored to witness the proclamation signing in recognition of National Bicycle Safety Month. It is exciting to know that there are initiatives ahead to enhance our roadways and expand dedicated bike lanes across the island. These efforts not only encourage cycling as a healthy, eco-friendly transportation option for residents, but also boost our island's appeal to visitors seeking scenic and sustainable travel experiences. This marks a meaningful step toward building infrastructure that supports the wellbeing of our community and strengthens our tourism industry.

### DISCUSSIONS ON DECOLONIZATION

The 4th Annual Fanhita Conference, hosted by the Commission on Decolonization (COD), was a thought-provoking experience. This year's theme, "Decolonization – Let's Talk About It," underscores the growing importance of open dialogue and community engagement in shaping our island's future. Creating spaces where our people can voice their perspectives and ask meaningful questions toward self-determination is vital. I thank the COD for fostering these essential conversations and empowering our community to take part in envisioning a future rooted in choice, identity, and unity.



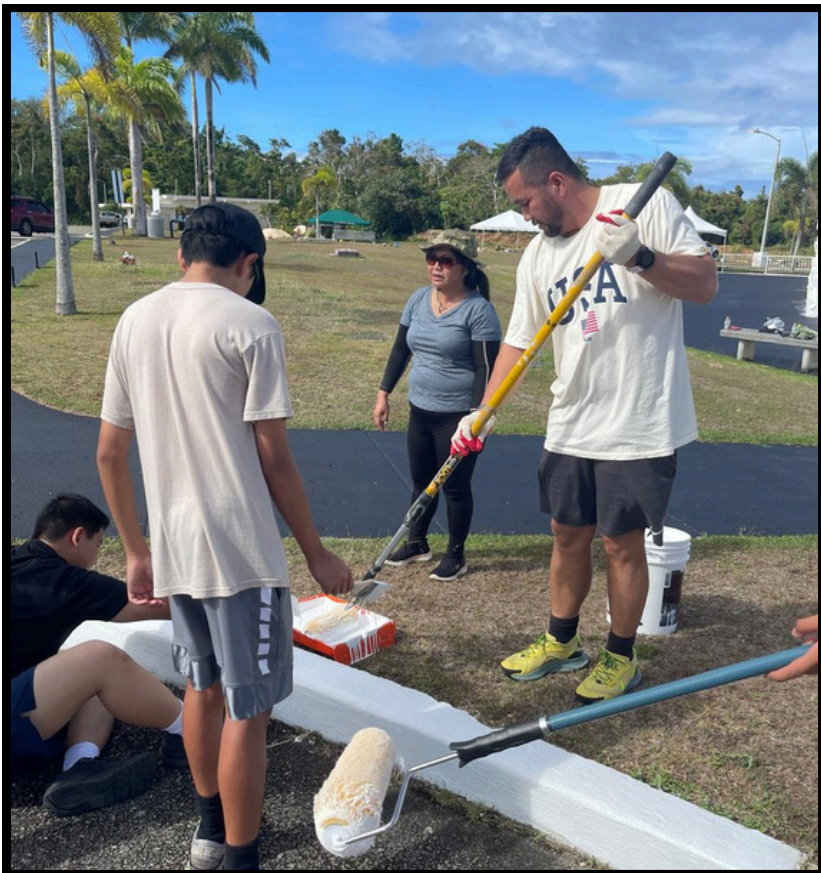
*4<sup>th</sup> Annual Fanhita Conference at the Hyatt Regency Guam on May 6, 2025.*



## OPERATION NEVER FORGOTTEN FOREVER

Memorial Day is an occasion to honor and express our deepest gratitude to the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our nation. Their courage and selflessness allow us to live in freedom, and for that, we are eternally grateful.

I was proud to volunteer in preparation for this year's Memorial Day ceremony by helping revitalize the Guam Veterans Cemetery. Thanks to the efforts of the American Red Cross and Guam Veterans Affairs, *Operation Never Forgotten Forever* brought our community together in a meaningful way. Through cleanup, painting, and refurbishment, we ensured that the final resting place of our fallen heroes reflects the respect and care they deserve. It was a powerful reminder that honoring their memory is not just about ceremony—but about stewardship and unity.



Volunteers gather to revitalize the Guam Veterans Cemetery on May 1, 2025.



# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY CERTIFICATE CEREMONY

**Scholarship, Leadership, Service, and Character**—these are the core values that Guam's National Honor Society students exemplify every day. Their commitment to these principles sets them apart as young leaders of exceptional promise, and for this, they deserve to be celebrated. It was wonderful to recognize over 200 National Honor Society students across all Guam high schools. I wholeheartedly commend the diligence, integrity, and dedication each of these students has demonstrated. Their achievements reflect not only personal excellence but a deep sense of responsibility to their schools, communities, and island. I have no doubt that their futures will be bright as they move on to a new chapter in their lives. They are beacons of hope and inspiration, guiding us toward a stronger and more successful Guam.



*The Class of 2025 National Honor Society students from each of Guam's high schools pose with their certificates of recognition during the presentation ceremony at the Guam Congress Building on May 2, 2025 with Senator Vincent Borja, Speaker Frank Blas, Jr., Senator Shelly Calvo, and Senator Sabrina Salas-Matanane.*



# HONORING OUR MANAMKO: “FLIP THE SCRIPT ON AGING”



There is a stirring in my heart each time I have the honor of greeting our elders with the traditional "Ñot" and "Ñora." These simple yet powerful gestures are acts of deep reverence, connecting us to a generation that has gifted us with invaluable wisdom, mentorship, and a deep appreciation for our unique CHamoru culture.

I am especially grateful to our Maga'håga, Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Lieutenant Governor Joshua Tenorio, the Department of Public Health and Social Services' Division of Senior Citizens, and the Mayors' Council of Guam for creating meaningful opportunities to uplift and celebrate our manåmko'. One such opportunity was the Proclamation Signing Ceremony, marking the beginning of Senior Citizens Month as May. It was followed by the Senior Citizens Luncheon hosted by the Guam Legislature—a joyful and moving gathering that celebrated the lives, legacies, and enduring contributions of our island's elders.

This year's theme, "Flip the Script on Aging," is both powerful and necessary. It calls us to challenge outdated perceptions and instead recognize the vibrancy, resilience, and wisdom our manåmko' continue to bring to our families and communities. Our elders are not just part of our past—they are active voices in our present and guiding lights for our future. Honoring them is not only a privilege but a responsibility we carry with pride and gratitude.





# HONORING A LIFETIME OF DEDICATION

As bittersweet as it may be to bid farewell to our beloved teachers upon their retirement, it brings me great joy to honor the many years of unwavering dedication, passion, and service they have given to our school and community. It is a time to reflect on the countless lives they have touched, the lessons they have imparted both inside and outside the classroom, and the lasting impact they have made on our students' growth, learning, and success. It is with this sentiment that I extend my warmest congratulations to Cathy Uncangco, a school aide for over 30 years, and James Schmidt, an educator for over 31 years, on their retirement from GDOE. As they begin this new chapter, I wish them a joyful and fulfilling retirement.



*James Schmidt and Cathy Uncangco receive their certificates of recognition on their retirement from GDOE at the Ypao Beach Park on May 22, 2025.*



# RESET & RENEW: HONORING THE JOURNEY OF HEALING

I am deeply grateful to the Guam National Guard for the opportunity to speak at its Resilience Event and Remembrance Candlelight Ceremony—an important tribute to honor our service members who have struggled with substance abuse, mental health challenges, or the silent battles that too often lead to suicide.

This solemn and powerful gathering served not only as a moment of remembrance but also as a beacon of hope. It reminded us that the well-being of our military community must remain a priority—not just in times of crisis, but every day. Events like these are critical. They foster spaces of healing, understanding, and connection. They remind us that resilience is not just about strength, but also about compassion and community.

The theme of the event, "Reset and Renew," speaks to the profound need for reflection, rediscovery, and the opportunity to begin again. It encourages each of us to take stock of where we've been, acknowledge our struggles, and move forward with purpose, humility, and support for one another.

As a veteran, I deeply resonate with the unique challenges that come with military service—the sacrifices made, the invisible wounds carried, and the sense of isolation that can follow. It is never easy to share such personal experiences, but I do so in the hope that my story can encourage others to speak up, seek help, and know they are not alone.





# CELEBRATING STUDENT SUCCESS

I am continually inspired when students rise above expectations and distinguish themselves through hard work, leadership, and excellence. It is with great pride and admiration that I congratulate Mr. Kevin Choi of St. John's School for being named a candidate for the prestigious U.S. Presidential Scholars Program—a national recognition that celebrates the very best in academic achievement, leadership, and service among high school seniors across the country.

Equally commendable is Ms. Julie Ann Laxamana, who has demonstrated exceptional dedication and civic engagement in her role as the Student Regent Board Member at the University of Guam. Her commitment to representing the voices of her peers is both admirable and inspiring.

Students such as Kevin and Julie Ann exemplify what it means to lead with purpose and integrity. Their accomplishments not only reflect their individual excellence but also bring pride to their schools, families, and our entire community. We celebrate them today and look forward to the great impact they will undoubtedly make in the future.



*Senator Borja enjoys a photo op with U.S. Presidential Scholars Program candidate Mr. Kevin Choi, St. John's School Head of School Michelle Untalan, and Assistant Head of School Bob Kelley.*



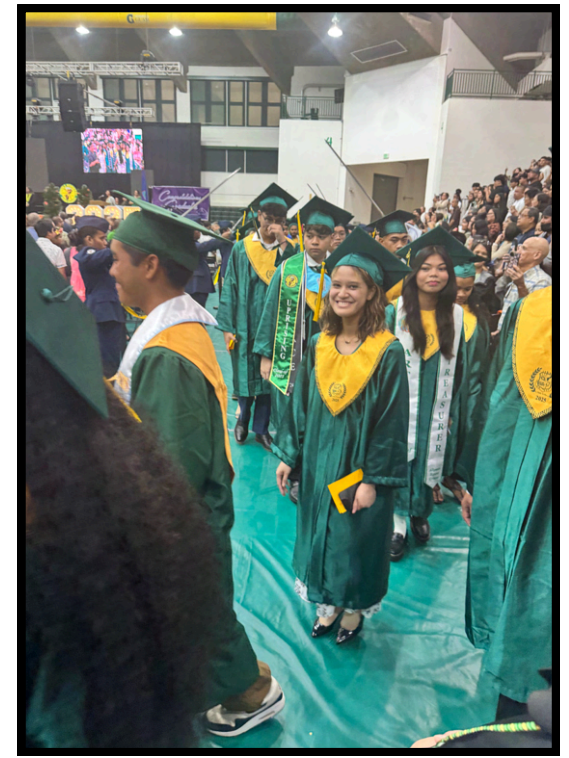
*Ms. Julie Ann Laxamana, accompanied by her family, receives a legislative certificate of recognition from Senator Borja for her role as the Student Regent Board Member at the University of Guam.*



# **JUNE 2025**

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

### **BIBA CLASS OF 2025: ROOTED IN GUAM, READY FOR THE WORLD**



To all the graduates across our beautiful island of Guam—congratulations on reaching this incredible milestone! Your hard work, determination, and perseverance have carried you through years of challenges and triumphs, and today, we celebrate not just your achievements, but the bright future that lies ahead.

As you close this chapter and step into the next, carry with you the values that make Guam so special—respect for others, love for family, pride in your culture, and strength in unity. Whether you choose to pursue higher education, serve in the military, enter the workforce, or explore new paths, remember that you are the future of our island, and we believe in your ability to lead with purpose and heart. This moment is not only yours but belongs to your parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, and the entire village that helped guide you here.

May the spirit of Guam go with you wherever you journey next. Biba Class of 2025!



# EXPLORING SOLUTIONS THROUGH PUBLIC HEARING FOR BILL NO. 70-38

As the Chairman of the Committee on Education, I recognize the importance of exploring sustainable solutions to address the Guam Department of Education's ongoing facility and funding challenges. I commend the intent of Bill 70-38, introduced by Senator Joe San Agustin, which seeks to authorize GDOE to lease out underutilized or closed school campuses and use the proceeds to support much-needed maintenance and classroom upgrades. With campuses like Chief Brodie and Lyndon B. Johnson Elementary recently closed, and the potential for more closures due to declining enrollment and budget constraints, this proposal offers a way to repurpose idle assets while supporting educational infrastructure. While I support the concept, it is crucial to ensure that issues such as land ownership, competitive leasing practices, and agency capacity are addressed. Stakeholders have raised valid concerns about ensuring revenues go directly to GDOE, clarifying land titles, and possibly partnering with professional real estate entities or GEDA to manage leases. As we move forward, I remain committed to working collaboratively with GDOE, the Guam Education Board, and fellow lawmakers to ensure this initiative benefits our students and safeguards public resources.



*Senators of the 38<sup>th</sup> Guam Legislature gather for a Public Hearing for Bill No. 70-38 on June 6<sup>th</sup> at the Guam Congress Building and receive meaningful testimonies from GDOE Superintendent, Dr. Erik Swanson and Guam Education Board Chairman, Mr. Angel Sablan.*



# LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION VISIT TO WASHINGTON, D. C.

I had the pleasure of traveling with Vice Speaker V. Anthony Ada and Senator Shelly Calvo to Washington, D.C. to build stronger partnerships with federal agencies and advocate for the needs of Guam's people—particularly in education and social services.

The meetings were productive, with federal officials offering guidance to improve how Guam accesses and manages federal resources. Discussions focused on improving procurement processes, expanding educational services, and increasing support for programs that serve youth, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and families. Most importantly, there was a shared commitment to ongoing collaboration and technical support.

This visit marks a positive step forward in ensuring that Guam receives the resources, attention, and respect it deserves, and that our island community continues to move toward a stronger, more equitable future.

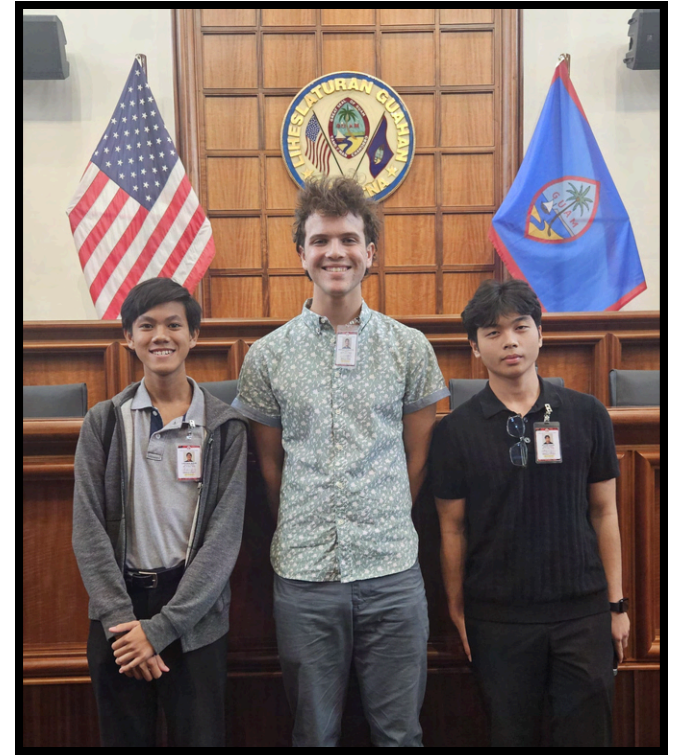
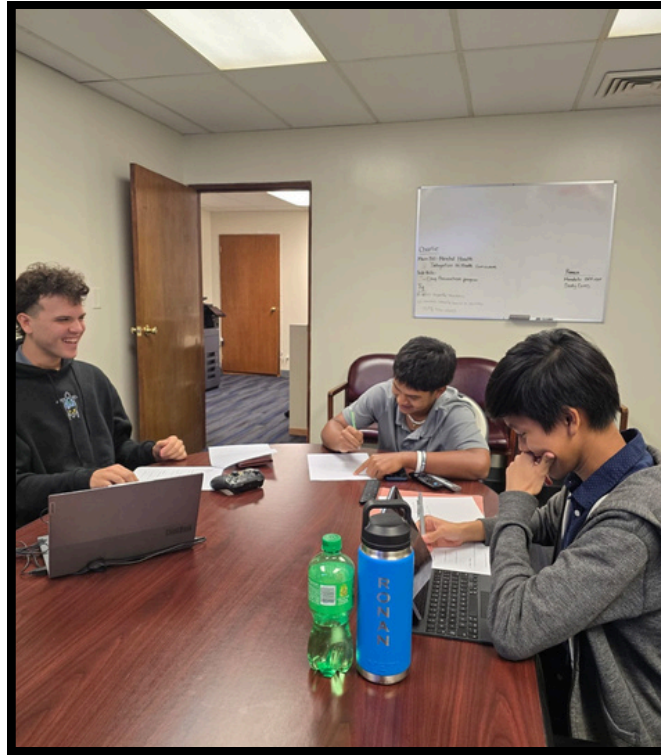


*Senator Borja, alongside Vice Speaker V. Anthony Ada and Senator Shelly Calvo, meet with key leaders in Washington, D.C. to strengthen partnerships and advocate for expanded support in education, social services, and critical programs for Guam's people.*



# SUMMER INTERNS

This summer, our interns are diving into meaningful, hands-on projects aimed at addressing some of Guam's most pressing challenges—including education, crime prevention, sustainability, and drug-related issues. Through dedicated research, community outreach, and collaborative discussions, these bright young minds are developing thoughtful policy proposals that reflect the needs and hopes of their generation. Their hard work and fresh perspectives are not only inspiring but also a powerful reminder that the voices of our youth are essential in shaping a stronger, more resilient future for our island.



*Interns Charlie, Ty, Ethan, and Ronan are enjoying their time at the Office of Senator Vincent A. V. Borja – collaborating on policy ideas they're passionate about, bonding over lunchtime music sessions, and attending legislative hearings to gain a deeper understanding of the policymaking process.*



# AHEAD — LOOKING



*The 38th Guam Legislature*

My second quarter in office has been both productive and challenging, but I remain committed to facing every obstacle head-on in service of our people. Looking ahead, my priorities include:

- ★ **Addressing the GDOE teacher shortage**
- ★ **Working closely with the U.S. Department of Education to secure funding for GDOE**
- ★ **Advancing policies that strengthen our educational system**

## **Your Voice Matters!**

The support of our island community and my colleagues has been invaluable to my efforts and I express my deepest gratitude. I encourage you to stay involved, share your thoughts, and sign up for our email updates to receive the latest news on our initiatives.

Stay connected: [www.senatorborja.com](http://www.senatorborja.com)

**SI YU'OS MA'ÅSE'**