

2022 Department of Public Lands Scholarship Essay Contest

Essay Prompt – “Should Article 12 be maintained, abolished, or amended and why?”

Since my adolescent years, I have always been educated about the importance of Article 12, and that the acquisition of permanent and long-term interest in real property is restricted to persons of Northern Marianas descent (NMD). The pristine land in the Northern Mariana Islands is a chain, or archipelago comprised of fourteen islands of which represent the cultural identity of our people. The islands are the pinnacle of the deepest part of the ocean called the Marianas Trench. Rota is lush with flora and fauna filled with many native species and latte stones. Tinian showcases the megalithic site known as House of Taga and its historic monuments. Saipan is brimming with historical sites from the World War II and abundant oceanic region of aquatic life. As a United States Territory, Article 12 set fourth restrictions that sparked numerous disagreements and debates. Protecting our land offers numerous environmental benefits such as providing a habitat for our native plants and animals and enhances the island’s ecosystem.

Nonetheless, I believe that Article 12 should never be abolished, and must be maintained to ensure that the Northern Marianas descents will carry on the land to their descendants. As a mother of three young children, I teach them the value to protect and preserve our land for their future. I educate them so that they understand that the land makes up our identity as Northern Marianas descents. The land represents our history of the Northern Marianas that has been published for record in NMI textbooks, Internet database, and articles. Article 12 protects our rich cultural diversity that connect us to our ancestor’s past.

Article 12 is a protection from the land that our ancestors preserved for our children, and for generations throughout. The thought of abolishing Article 12 would place numerous threats to our lands such as development, military expansion, and dissemination of artifacts. The artifacts and historical landmarks, such as World War II bunkers, relics, latte stones, cliffs, caves and World War II sites, can be found on public lands; allowing current and future generations to discover and embrace our history. If we abolish or amend Article 12, allowing for removal and additional development will take away the Northern Marianas history; to which one cannot replace.

Look to our neighboring island of Hawaii. The native people continue to advocate for the protection of Mauna Kea and their land preservation. Their protests and cries for justice to protect their land is an unfortunate situation; that should never occur for native people in the Pacific. This is an ideal example of what may occur if our sacred land is taken away from the indigenous people of the Northern Mariana Islands. In Saipan, the dilapidated buildings left abandoned many decades ago are untouched. The buildings should be restored and reused, in lieu of utilizing more land to build throughout the island. If you allow Article 12 to be abolished, what will transpire when investors continue to take the land and build for development? What will happen to the wetlands and sanctuaries that protect our endangered species and environment? In terms of endangered species, the Mariana fruit dove is the only bird in the Marianas that cannot be found anywhere else on Earth. If we destroy more land, the endangered

animals and plants in the Northern Mariana Islands will transmute to extinction and become irreplaceable. For decades, many have attempted to amend, or even abolish Article 12 for more opportunities of land development and investment. However, the indigenous people continue to voice the concerns to protect the land. The islands rely on tourism to boost the economy and revenue. The tourists come to the islands to seek knowledge of the history of the Marianas, and the culture that represents our indigenous people.

For centuries, the plants on the land have been utilized for local medicinal use and resources to sustain the culture and way of life of our ancestors. Our land sustains every aspect of our economy and daily lives. It provides fundamental life-support systems and is the sole foundation of our economy and society. As Northern Marianas Descents, we must unite and preserve our culture and tradition that safeguards our identity as indigenous people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. As an indigenous daughter of the Marianas, it is my duty to voice my belief that Article 12 should be maintained in the Northern Mariana Islands. It is my duty to advocate and protect what has been passed down from our ancestors, so that our sacred lands will be protected from generations to come. Article 12 is the segue for the next generation to stand, advocate, and protect our sacred land. We indigenous sons and daughters of the Northern Mariana Islands, are the pillars, and guardians of our sanctified land of the Marianas.

The land that I was born and raised will continue to hold memories for my children, grandchildren, and for generations in the future. We, the people of Northern Marianas descents are the stewards of land preservation and cultural identity. It is paramount that we maintain Article 12 to promote the importance of land preservation. Our land is the responsibility of the Northern Marianas Descents to protect, preserve, and embrace as a gift from our ancestors. Prutehi yan defendi (Protect and Defend) Article 12.