

CSC wants bigger Ombudsman role vs tobacco industry interference | SunStar

S sunstar.com.ph /manila/local-news/2017/09/29/csc-wants-bigger-ombudsman-role-vs-tobacco-industry-interference-566769

29/09/2017



THE Civil Service Commission (CSC) on Friday pushed for the inclusion of the Office of the Ombudsman in the effort to protect the government against interference from the tobacco industry.

In a press conference launching the Tobacco Industry Interference Index Country Report 2017, CSC Assistant Commissioner Ariel Ronquillo said they are looking to include the Ombudsman as a party to the Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) 2010-01 the former issued with the Department of Health (DOH).

"CSC is now in the process of introducing revisions to the JMC to strengthen it. We are planning to include the Ombudsman in the JMC to prosecute higher people in government," said Ronquillo.

He said the initiative was prompted by the difficulty they currently face in holding accountable erring top government officials, such as the head of agencies.

"We know very well that the tobacco industry will approach those that are at the executive level, whose disciplining authority is with the Ombudsman," said Ronquillo.

"People reported were usually not under our jurisdiction," he furthered.

In 2010, the DOH and the CSC issued the JMC, which prohibits all officials and employees any interaction with the tobacco industry, as well as the code of conduct for government personnel during necessary interactions with the latter.

The move is in accordance with the provisions of the World Health Organization (WHO) - Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3, which aims to protect public health policies from tobacco industry interference.

Meanwhile, the Tobacco Industry Interference Index Country Report 2017 revealed that the industry continues to

find ways to make its presence felt in government through its corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.

This, according to public health policy think tank Health Justice Philippines, is despite the prevailing ban on government participation in CSR activities of tobacco firms.

"Tobacco companies are still vigorously circumventing health and tobacco control policies by initiating partnerships with government agencies, local government units, and public officials under the guise of conducting corporate social responsibility programs," said Health Justice President Mary Ann Fernandez-Mendoza.

Citing as an example, Health Justice pointed at the CSR arm of Mighty Corporation, Wong Chu King Foundation, which had supposedly engaged in several activities such as school feeding, and donations to police stations and schools in 2016.

"They hide behind their so-called foundations and welfare organizations, deceiving the public and authorities into believing that they are not violating the JMC," noted Mendoza.

Health Justice, then, said it is important that the ban on CSR partnerships between the government and tobacco firms must be expanded and must include foundations and other private organizations.

Mendoza also said there is a need to "denormalize" CSR activities of tobacco companies. **(HDT/SunStar Philippines)**