

# Free education law entices Filipinos to finish college: CHED

**MANILA** -- The long line of students wanting to be a beneficiary of the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) financial assistance program is an indication of the positive impact of the free college education law to Filipino students, an official said on Wednesday.

In a statement, CHED chair J. Prospero de Vera III said the full implementation of Republic Act 10931 or Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act has encouraged more youth to finish college.

College students who want to avail of the Student Financial Assistance Programs (STuFAPS) are given from February until the end of the month to file their applications.

"Kamakailan ay naging usap-usapan sa social media at sa ilang balita ang habang pila ng mga estudyanteng nagnanais maging benepisaryo ng STuFAPS. Ibinalita sa isang istasyon ng telebisyon na sinisilaw ng komisyon ang mga estudyanteng pumipila dahil kung kailan malapit na ang deadline ay saka lamang sila nagsusumite ng aplikasyon sa CHED (The long line of students seeking to be beneficiaries of STuFAPS has been trending in the social media and some news. One television station reported that the commission is blaming the students who have submitted their applications close to the deadline for the long line)," he said.

STuFAPS are government-funded scholarships, grants-in-aid, student loans, subsidies, and other incentives for qualified students who want to finish college or technical-vocational courses.

De Vera belied the report, noting that the increasing number of students seeking scholarships and grants-in-aid represent the bulk of Filipino youth needing financial assistance to reach their goal of earning a college degree.

He said a new system would be implemented in 2020 where scholarship applicants could submit their application forms and requirements online, or dropboxes where applicants can leave their documents or requirements. (PNA)

# Be neutral in giving permits for campaign rallies: DILG to LGU execs

**MANILA** -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Thursday reminded officials of local government units to be fair in issuing permits for political rallies as the May 13 mid-term polls draw near.

"Play a fair game. Let us not deprive voters (of) the chance to get to know their candidates to help them decide whom to vote for," Interior Secretary Eduardo M. Año said in a statement.

The reminder came following President Rodrigo Duterte's remarks that some local officials refuse to grant their opponents permits for political rallies.

"Kung gusto kayo ng tao, iboboto nila kayo ulit. (If the people want you to stay, they will vote for you again.) So let's not resort to shenanigans and just present your platform to the people and allow

them to make intelligent choices," he added.

Through DILG Memorandum Circular 2019-61, Año said Section 87 of Batas Pambansa Bilang 881 or the Omnibus Election Code states that any political party may hold peaceful political rallies, meetings, and other similar activities during the campaign period.

The same provision provides that application for permits must be acknowledged in writing, posted in conspicuous places in the city or municipal buildings, and acted upon in writing by the authorities concerned within three days after its filing. Any application not acted upon within the said period shall be deemed approved.

"The right of candidates to hold political rallies was also reiterated in a Commission on Elections

(Comelec) resolution, which provides that they should be given equal and fair opportunity as to date, time and place, to hold public political rallies," Año said.

Comelec Resolution 10488, dated Jan. 30, 2019 also states that "it is unlawful for any candidate, party, or any person to give or accept, free of charge, directly or indirectly, transportation, food and drinks, or anything of value during and within five hours before and after a public meeting or to give or contribute, directly or indirectly, money or things of value for such purpose."

"Both the Omnibus Election Code and the Comelec resolution stress that the only justifiable ground to deny an application for permit is when a prior written application by another candidate or po-

# DILG serves Ombudsman's dismissal order vs. Malay, Aklan mayor

**MANILA** -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Thursday said the dismissal order issued by the Office of the Ombudsman has been served to Malay, Aklan Mayor Cicero S. Cawaling and the town's licensing officer for grave misconduct and other offenses that led to Boracay's environmental crisis.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said the dismissal order was implemented after the Ombudsman decision found Cawaling and Licensing Officer Jen F. Salsona guilty of gross neglect of duty, conduct unbecoming of a pub-

lic official, and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of service.

According to Año, the Ombudsman, in its decision, found substantial evidence against the two considering that during their incumbency as local government officials, some establishments operated without the requisite fire safety inspection certificate and some did not even possess the necessary permits.

Año said Regional Director Ariel Iglesia of DILG Western Visayas served the Ombudsman dismissal order against Cawaling by posting it at the mayor's office. The order was also received by the

Business Permits and Licensing Office.

Some of the businesses also encroached upon the 25+5 meter easement and violated Malay Municipal Ordinance No. 2000-131.

"By not implementing this Ordinance, Cawaling violated Section 444 (b) (2) of Republic Act 7160, which commands him to enforce all laws and ordinances relative to the governance of the Municipality of Malay," the decision stated.

The DILG chief said the dismissal order on Cawaling and Salsona comes with forfeiture of retirement benefits (ex-

cept accrued leave credits) and perpetual disqualification for re-employment in the government service.

The Ombudsman decision was approved on April 22, 2019 by Ombudsman Samuel Martires and was received by the DILG on the same day.

The case against Cawaling and Salsona stemmed from the administrative complaint filed by the DILG against 18 local government officials based on the findings of the Boracay Investigating Team.

The Ombudsman initially ordered a six-month preventive suspension, without pay, for alleged violation of the Local Government Code or Republic Act 7160 and the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices or Republic Act 3019.

Meanwhile, DILG spokesperson Undersecretary Jonathan Malaya said he hopes the Ombudsman decision will serve as a warning to all local chief executives that violation of environmental laws has serious repercussions.

"We hope that other LGUs will now be more proactive in protecting the environment and will not wait for the DILG to file cases against them. We urge other LGUs especially in the Manila Bay Watershed area to take their responsibilities seriously and work closely with the DILG in the rehabilitation and clean-up efforts," he said.

Malaya also said that the case against Aklan Governor Florencio T. Miraflores, Aklan Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer Valentin Talabero, Malay Vice-Mayor Abram Sualog, and Malay Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer Edgardo Sancho was dismissed by the Ombudsman for lack of substantial evidence.

# Cebu teen slay case: Self-confessed killer's DNA found on scissors

**MANILA** -- The DNA of Renato Llenes, the self-confessed suspect in the killing of a teenage girl in Cebu, matched with the samples found in the pair of scissors used in the crime.

"The DNA exam conducted by the PNP crime lab on the pair of scissors reveals positive findings of presence of DNA of both victim Christine Lee Silawan and suspect Renato Llenes in the said scissors," PNP spokesperson Col. Bernard Banac told reporters Wednesday.

Last April 11, PNP chief Gen. Oscar Albay-

alde lauded the police for the arrest of Llenes on April 9 along Bangkal Road, Barangay Bangkal, Lapu-Lapu City for carrying an unlicensed pistol despite the election gun ban.

The police confiscated from Llenes a .45-caliber pistol and a magazine with six live ammunition.

Albayalde said Llenes, who has a live-in-partner and five children, used a pair of scissors in stabbing Silawan and in scraping off her face. The suspect said he saw a "Momo challenge" way of killing and did it on

the 16-year-old girl.

Albayalde said Llenes executed an extra-judicial confession on the same day he was arrested and "voluntarily narrated his involvement in the killing of Silawan."

The PNP chief said the suspect did the confession because "he was haunted by his conscience".

Albayalde said Llenes introduced himself to Silawan on Facebook using a dummy account by the name "CJ Diaz" and sent her a friend request, which the victim accepted.

Llenes admitted he has been addicted to drugs and that he was under its influence when he killed the victim.

Albayalde said Llenes was assisted by two lawyers -- a private attorney and a member of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO), when he executed his out-of-court confession.

Albayalde said the police will still coordinate with the National Bureau of Investigation in Region 7 (NBI-7), as some pieces of evidence, such as the victim's cellphone, is still in its custody.

litical party for the same purpose has been approved," Año noted.

Such denial may still be appealed to the provincial election supervisor or the regional election supervisor, for cases in the National Capital Region, who shall decide on the matter within 48 hours and notify the concerned parties, he said.

"All local officials are reminded that as public officers, it is our duty to uphold free, orderly,

honest, peaceful and credible elections. Hence, compliance with existing election laws shall take precedence over personal interests," the DILG chief said.

The campaign period is almost three months for senatorial candidates and party-list groups and more than one month for governors down to municipal councilors and district representatives. (PNA)