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ACRC Pushes for Amendments to the Act on the Protection of Public Interest Whistleblowers and Other Laws for Tighter Whistleblower Protection

- ACRC announced a legislative notice for partial amendments to the Act on the Protection of Public Interest Whistleblowers and the Act on the Prevention of Corruption and the Establishment and Operation of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, seeking to strengthen the protection and support for whistleblowers

(5, November. 2025, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan) announced a 40-day legislative notice period from November 5 to December 15 for partial amendments to the Act on the Protection of Public Interest Whistleblowers and the Act on the Prevention of Corruption and the Establishment and Operation of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (the Anti-Corruption Act)

The purpose of these amendments is to enhance the uniformity of regulations related to the protection and support of public interest whistleblowers and those reporting corrupt acts, thereby increasing the level of protection for whistleblowers. Key elements are as follows:

The proposed partial revisions to the "Act on the Protection of Public Interest Whistleblowers" include: clarifying the regulations pertaining to the cost support when internal public interest whistleblowers receive legal assistance for anonymous proxy reporting (Article 8-3(1) of the proposed revision bill); broadening the scope of protection applications to include scenarios where adverse actions are anticipated, not only when they have occurred (Article 17(1) of the proposed revision bill); and reducing grounds for dismissal of protection applications to strengthen the level of protection (Article 18(1) of the proposed revision bill).

Additionally, the revision bill introduced a temporary suspension of disadvantageous measures to prevent irreparable harm in advance (Article 22) and established penalties for non-compliance (Article 30(4)).

The proposed revisions to the Anti-Corruption Act include: establishing cost support regulations when internal whistleblowers receive legal aid for anonymous proxy reporting (Article 58-3); introducing an obligation to comply with committee demands for disciplinary action or violations of secrecy obligation (Articles 62-3(4) and 64(4)); and introducing checks on the implementation of protection measure decisions (Article 62-3(7)) to enhance whistleblower protection.

The amendments also add the cases where efforts to identify the whistleblower are made, or where interference, coercion for cancellation, or disadvantageous measures within two years after reporting exist to the list of grounds to presume that adverse actions have occurred (Article 63) and extend the applicable scope of personal safety measures and omission of personal details to include collaborators, relatives, and cohabitants (Articles 64-2(1) and 64-3).

Furthermore, the amendments prohibit damage claims against whistleblowers (Article 66(5)), nullify provisions prohibiting or restricting reporting (Article 66(6)), and extend the scope of protection to cases where reports are made to investigative agencies through complaints or tips, and reports made to the Board of Audit and Inspection (Article 67).

The ACRC plans to disclose the detailed content of these amendments on its website (www.acrc.go.kr) and widely gather public opinions for reflection during the 40-day legislative notice period.

Kim Eung Tae, Director General of the Inspection and Protection Bureau at the ACRC, stated, "These amendments aim to enhance the uniformity of the whistleblower protection and support system," further adding that, "by strengthening

the effectiveness of whistleblower protection, we hope to secure public trust in the corruption and public interest reporting system."

"Commitment to Cooperation Reaffirmed at APEC"... **Republic of Korea and Thailand Sign an MOU on** **Anti-Corruption Cooperation**

- The ACRC and Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) signed an MOU at the Government Complex Sejong on November 26, 2025, to strengthen bilateral anti-corruption cooperation.

(26, November. 2025, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC)* on November 26, 2025, to strengthen bilateral anti-corruption cooperation.

* Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC): an independent constitutional body established under Thailand's Constitution, responsible for investigating corruption cases and reviewing public officials' asset declarations, among other duties.

On November 26, 2025, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan of the ACRC and Mr. Phattarasak Vannasaeng, an NACC Commissioner, signed the MOU on anti-corruption cooperation at the Government Complex Sejong. They were scheduled to discuss the future direction and plans for cooperation between the two commissions.

Thailand is a major member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is home to the largest number of international organizations in Asia, giving it strong potential for diverse cooperation.

Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) signed an MOU with the ACRC in 2010 and, through 2016, was introduced to Korea's anti-corruption

policies, including the Corruption Impact Assessment and the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions (CIA). Building on this, the NACC has developed a model tailored to Thailand's national context and has been operating it.

This agreement renews the previous MOU between the two commissions, which expired in 2016. Building on the momentum generated at the recent APEC meetings, it aims to reaffirm the two countries' shared commitment to international anti-corruption cooperation and to deepen and expand anti-corruption exchanges and institutional cooperation between the two commissions.

Under this agreement, the two commissions will cooperate across a wide range of areas, including ▲ exchanging anti-corruption policies and experiences, ▲ developing and implementing joint anti-corruption initiatives, and ▲ strengthening cooperation within international anti-corruption consultative bodies.

Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan of the ACRC stated, "Through the APEC High-Level Dialogue on Anti-Corruption Cooperation held in the Republic of Korea in 2025, the need to enhance strategic exchanges and cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region was reaffirmed." He added, "With the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), I hope that anti-corruption exchanges between the two countries will be further strengthened."

ACRC Uncovers Public Institution Overpaying 600 Billion Won in Wages

- The ○○ Corporation has inflated wages over the past 8 years, allocating approximately 600 billion won excessively under the guise of 'wage increases for permanent positions,' which employees divided among themselves

(6, November. 2025, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan) announced that it has uncovered that the ○○ Corporation allocated approximately 600 billion won more than permitted in wages, in violation of government guidelines, and distributed it among employees from 2016 to 2023 and has forwarded their findings to the supervising agency.

As a quasi-government agency, the ○○ Corporation is required to allocate wages within the limits set by the government, following regulations such as the "Act on the Management of Public Institutions" and the "Budget Management Guidelines for Public Enterprises and Quasi-Governmental Institutions."

According to related regulations like the "Budget Management Guidelines for Public Enterprises and Quasi-Governmental Institutions" and the "Public Institutions Management Evaluation Manual," when allocating wages for team members (grades 4 to 6), the ○○ Corporation must apply the salary of the original grade, not a higher grade, even if there are vacancies at higher levels.

However, in violation of the regulations, the ○○ Corporation used the salaries of higher grades (grade 4 for grade 5, and grade 5 for grade 6) improperly, resulting in an excessive allocation of a total of 599.5 billion won in wages for 8 years from 2016 to 2023.

It was found that ○○ Corporation paid the excessively allocated wages, dividing them by grade under the pretext of ‘wage increases for permanent positions’ at the end of the year.

According to the result of the ACRC investigation, the Committee on Public Institution Operation identified the violations in 2024, but only ordered a reduction of 144.3 billion won from the wages allocated excessively for 2023.

Nevertheless, the ACRC discovered that an additional 455.2 billion won in total wages from 2016 to 2022 had also been excessively calculated, but not included in the initial reduction. As a result, the ACRC submitted the case to the supervisory agency of the ○○ Corporation, recommending sanctions for the excessive wage allocation over the past 8 years and measures to ensure that the ○○ Corporation complies with government guidelines for wage allocation from 2024 onwards.

Ryu Chul Whan, Chairperson of the ACRC, said, "This case is an example of a public institution, operated with taxpayer money, arbitrarily executing wages for years in disregard of laws and government guidelines."

He further emphasized, "To maintain public trust, public institutions must take measures to ensure that incidents like this do not recur. The ACRC will continue to strive to see to it that public institutions operated with public funds are run disinterestedly and transparently."

UN-Recognized K-Anti-Corruption Systems to Be Shared Directly with Kazakhstan

- The ACRC will conduct a three-day anti-corruption training program in Kazakhstan from November 25 to 27, 2025, to disseminate Korea's flagship anti-corruption systems, including the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions (CIA) and the whistleblower protection system.

(25, November. 2025, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan) announced that it will share Korea's flagship anti-corruption systems—the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions (CIA) and the whistleblower protection system—with Kazakhstan directly.

From November 25 to 27, 2025, the Anti-Corruption Training Institute (ACTI) under the ACRC visited Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, and Almaty, one of the country's major cities, and ran a training course on institutional improvements in corruption prevention for around 100 participants. Participants included officials from the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs and the Anti-Corruption Service of the National Security Committee, as well as other anti-corruption-related agencies, along with compliance officers from public institutions and public enterprises.

This program was carried out as part of the ACRC's official development assistance(ODA) projects. As a follow-up to the invitation training program hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan in June 2025, it was designed to support the effective introduction of Korea's anti-corruption systems in Kazakhstan, including the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions (CIA).

The Republic of Korea is the only country in the world to have achieved both democracy and economic development in tandem. It is regarded as a model country, as reflected in its steady upward trend in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Accordingly, requests for training from countries seeking to learn Korea's anti-corruption policies and implementation experience have continued to increase.

In particular, the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions (CIA)—first introduced by the Republic of Korea in 2002 as the world's first system of its kind—won the 1st prize in the category of "Preventing and Combating Corruption in the Public Service" at the 2012 United Nations Public Service Awards (UNPSA), and has been shared with about ten countries, including Indonesia, Viet Nam, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Algeria.

In addition, Korea's protection system for corruption reporters and public interest whistleblowers has been internationally recognized for its excellence, including being featured in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)'s 2015 "Resource Guide on Good Practices in the Protection of Reporting Persons."

Kim Se-shin, Director of the ACRC's Anti-Corruption Training Institute, said, "Given that Kazakhstan is the Republic of Korea's largest trading partner among Central Asian countries and a key partner for cooperation in Central Asia, we will further expand cooperation and exchanges in the field of anti-corruption."

He added, "We will continue to disseminate K-anti-corruption policies throughout the international community, take the lead in advancing democracy worldwide, and further enhance the Republic of Korea's international standing."

Vocational High Schools Lagging Behind in Managing International Students...Improve Institution for Advanced K-Vocational Education

- *Senseless recruitment amid sharp decline in school-age population, red-flagged rights and safety of under-aged international students*
- *ACRC recommends to establish Standard Operating Procedures to Ministry of Education, Management Regulations to city and provincial education offices*

(13, November. 2025, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Ryu Chul Whan) has confirmed that while recruitment of Invited Foreign Scholarship Students is rapidly increasing at some vocational high schools, inadequate management and supervision of these students raises concerns about their rights and safety. The ACRC established and recommended institutional improvement measures for relevant agencies to enhance transparency in the selection and operation processes and protect student rights and interests.

Vocational high schools face an existential crisis due to the recent severe decline in the school-age population. Enrollment at special-purpose high schools, which constitute 90% of the vocational high school, has fallen from 100,000 students in 2014 to 58,000 this year—practically halving in a decade—and exacerbating operational difficulties of schools.

Against this backdrop, some vocational high schools are competitively expanding Invited Foreign Scholarship Students. The number of invited students, which was only 16 (Seoul) in 2023, increased to 54 (Seoul and Gyeongsangbukdo) in 2024 and 155 (Seoul, Gyeongsangbukdo, and

Jeollanamdo) in 2025. Plans indicate that seven education offices plan to recruit approximately 290 students in 2026.

In contrast to the competitive recruitment, the regulations and systems for actual management are inadequate. This raises serious concerns about counter-effects such as budget waste, student rights violation, and corruption. Particularly urgent were measures to address issues such as excessive recruitment and poor academic management that are deviated from the purpose of the invitation programs, providing distorted information while their recruitment, and the lack of safety measures for minor-aged students during their study abroad.

The Commission thus recommended the Ministry of Education to establish Standard Operational Rule for Invited Foreign Scholarship Student to strengthen management and supervision.

The rule was requested to include: reasonable purposes of invitation and appropriate recruitment and selection criteria; specific admission and graduation standards; and systematic academic management and support measures.

Furthermore, the ACRC recommended each metropolitan and provincial office of education to establish specific Management Regulation for Invited Foreign Scholars at Vocational High Schools to prevent potential human rights violations and safety incidents in educational environment.

The regulation was requested provisions for: establishing a official selection system to ensure transparent information during recruitment and selection, with prevention of illegal brokers; measures to protect students' right to self-determination; academic goal management and support, aligned with the purpose of the scholarship program; student safety management through a dedicated management system; and ensuring safe field training by strengthening verification of training companies.

Chairperson Ryu of the ACRC stated, “While supporting advanced technical education for emerging countries is important, ensuring young foreign students to focus on their studies in a safe environment and have their human rights protected is the top priority.” Adding, “We expect this institutional improvement will enhance the credibility of Korea's international education assistance, cut corruption risks, and build an opportunity for advanced K-vocational education to rise.”