

ACRC Korea Transparency Newsletter (March 2026)

- To Break the Cycle of Recurring Petitions and Long-Standing Conflicts, the Blue House, the Prime Minister's Secretariat Office, and the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission Jointly Organize a Government-Wide "Grievance Innovation Forum" with Over 140 Agencies
- The Number of Citizen Counselors Increased More Than Quadrupled from Last Year to Resolve Unusual Complaints Through Communication and Active Listening
- Visually Impaired Individuals Can Now Directly Check the Results of Administrative Appeals with the Newly Launched Voice Support Service
- Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, ACRC Held Explanatory Sessions for 17 Provincial and Metropolitan Offices of Education Nationwide
- ACRC Will Provide the Strongest Protection Possible Whether It's Public Interest Report or Corruption Report

To Break the Cycle of Recurring Petitions and Long-Standing Conflicts, the Blue House, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat Office, and the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission Jointly Organize a Government-Wide “Grievance Innovation Forum” with Over 140 Agencies

- *Directly hearing voices from the field through the “Town Hall Meeting for Unusual Petitions” chaired by the Public Conflict Mediation Secretary of the Presidential Office*
- *A paradigm shift in grievance resolution: from resolving an eight-year Stalemate to the deployment of an AI-Powered Petition Assistant*

(March 31, 2026, ACRC)

The Blue House, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat Office (Chief of Staff Min Kee), and the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Jung Il Yeon) jointly held a pan-government innovation forum on March 31 at the Korea Press Center to address collective grievances and unusual public petitions. They declared their commitment to resolving chronic conflicts and comprehensively innovating the public petition handling system.

The forum brought together 300 participants, including heads and staff of public grievance departments from over 140 central and local governments and public institutions, to directly experience practical grievance resolution tools and successful case studies applicable in the field.

(Communicative Innovation) Candid Town Hall Meeting Between the Presidential Office and Front-line Public Officials Handling Public Grievances

The main event of the forum, the Town Hall Meeting for Unusual Petitions, was chaired by Joo Jin Woo, Public Conflict Mediation Secretary of the Presidential Office. Going beyond mere opinion gathering, the session allowed front-line civil servants to share success stories and lessons learned from handling unusual civil petitions, thereby exchanging practical know-how. It also provided an opportunity to candidly hear about the real-world challenges faced

by public officials who handle civil petitions in the field, such as emotional labor and safety threats. At the same time, the session explored institutional mechanisms to listen to and handle unusual public petitions more rationally, as well as policy alternatives to protect the officials responsible for handling them.

(Operational Innovation) Sharing the Secrets of Success: From Resolving an Eight-Year Stalemate to a Paradigm Shift on Controversial Facilities

The forum also featured innovative cases of conflict mediation whose solutions were found on-site. Investigator Seo Sang Won of the ACRC shared a case in which he resolved an eight-year deadlock—marked by lawsuits and accusations between KEPCO (Korea Electric Power Corporation) and Dangjin City over the construction of a transmission line—through 24 on-site consultations, ultimately clearing the way for the Energy Highway Project, a core national energy network. Head of Mutual Cooperation, Park Ji Hye of K-water presented the case of the Hapcheon Floating Solar Power Development Facility, which had been an unwelcome facility but was transformed into a local landmark through resident-participatory profit sharing and design improvements. Head of Regional Cooperation, Yoon Sang Geun of the Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power (KHNP) introduced the case of the Yeongdong Pumped Storage Power Plant, which addressed living conditions and local economic issues by thinking outside the box —specifically by repurposing unsold houses as relocation housing for residents displaced by flooding.

(Tool Innovation) Launch of the Complaint Rationality Review Committee and Deployment of an AI-Powered Petitions Assistant

Specific implementation tools to alleviate the workload on administrative institutions and nurture a culture of proactive conflict resolution were also presented. Secretary to the Prime Minister for Civil Affairs, Lee Yong Ha, introduced the AI-Powered Petition Assistant—a program he self-developed without a dedicated budget to boost work efficiency—which summarizes vast quantities of petitions and automatically provides relevant laws and regulations. He announced that he would distribute the program free of charge to any organization wishing to use it. The Complaint Rationality Review Committee under the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, which aims to review and address

petitions that have reached a stalemate due to regulatory constraints, presented 11 cases of innovation to disseminate the value of people-centered government.

(Capacity Innovation) Lecture by Professor Kim Hak Rin: “Changes in Conflict Management and Understanding Mediation”

A lecture was delivered by Professor Kim Hak Rin of Dankook University, an expert in conflict management, on the topic of “Changes in Conflict Management and Understanding Mediation.” Professor Kim proposed methodologies to pivot the role of public officials from routine administrative processing to “professional mediators,” while enhancing their practical mediation capabilities against a backdrop of increasingly complex public conflicts.

Chairperson Jung Il Yeon of the ACRC stated “This forum—the first-ever joint event of the Presidential Office, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, and the ACRC—will serve as a groundbreaking milestone to enhance the capacity of administrative agencies to resolve collective conflicts, handle unusual petitions rationally, and strengthen protections for public officials in charge of petition handling.” He added, “I hope this serves as an opportunity for public officials to sincerely empathize with the difficulties faced by citizens and to resolve misunderstanding.”

Public Conflict Mediation Secretary Joo Jin Woo of the Presidential Office said, “A government based on popular sovereignty prioritizes the resolution of collective and unusual complaints through active listening and persuasion, and government agencies must therefore strengthen their own problem-solving capabilities.” He added, “Resolving complaints at the front lines will significantly reduce social costs and the recurrence of complaints.”

Presentation materials of the forum are available at the “Publications on Grievance Petitions” section under the Policy & Information tab of the ACRC website (www.acrc.go.kr). As the event was live-streamed via the Commission’s official YouTube channel, the general public can easily access the full recording.

The Number of Citizen Counselors Increased More Than Quadrupled from Last Year to Resolve Unusual Complaints Through Communication and Active Listening

- The ACRC expands the number of Citizen Counselors to 112
to provide customized support for unusual petitions*
- An appointment ceremony for Citizen Counselors was held on March 13,
chaired by Chairperson Jung*

(March 13, 2026, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Jung Il Yeon) has significantly expanded its pool of Citizen Counselors for Unusual Petitions—a group composed of civilian experts—to support administrative agencies in responding to the unusual petitions* and to communicate with and listen to the petitioners who file them.

* Unusual petitions: Petitions that are difficult to handle through standard procedures since they are repeatedly or habitually filed without just cause, or because they primarily consist of abusive language, threats, insults, sexual harassment, and similar misconduct.

The ACRC held a Citizen Counselor Appointment Ceremony chaired by Chairperson Jung on March 13 at 2:00 P.M. in the main conference room of the ACRC, attended by 60 Citizen Counselor candidates.

There has been a consistent call from the public sector for solutions to address unusual petitions—those filed repeatedly or in duplicate due to dissatisfaction with the petition outcomes—as they cause psychological harm and hinder work performance, resulting in a waste of administrative resources.

As the coordinating body for handling such petitions, the ACRC appointed 20 experts from the private sector—including lawyers, psychological counselors, and retired public officials—as Citizen Counselors last May to strengthen the capabilities of administrative agencies and protect the public officials responsible for handling petitions. These counselors listened to the difficulties of public officials, provided psychological and legal counseling, and offered

training as well as consulting services.

※ Provided support for a total of 182 cases in 2025 (117 training and consulting session, 65 psychological and legal counseling sessions)

Despite these efforts, unusual petitions continue* and the public officials handling them keep facing difficulties**. Against this backdrop, the ACRC decided to significantly expand its pool of Citizen Counselors—going beyond merely supporting public officials—to also listen to the petitioners, communicate with them, and provide customized counseling.

* One individual filed a total of 46,685 repetitive complaints through the e-People in 2025

** A survey conducted by the ACRC in 2025 found that 947 out of 1,097 public officials (86%) who attended a workshop for unusual petitions had dealt with 5,123 such petitioners over the past three years (an average of 5.5 per person). These officials reported suffering from mental stress, excessive workloads, and the burden of having to respond to additional audits and lawsuits.

The newly appointed counselors feature significantly more psychological counselors and legal experts, who were previously in short supply*. A total of 92 new Citizen Counselors—including 10 conflict mediation experts and 10 psychiatrists—have been appointed, bringing the total number of Citizen Counselors to 112**, including the existing 20.

* Psychological counselors (2 → 22), legal experts (2 → 23)

** 22 in psychology, 23 in law, 57 in administration and conflict resolution, 10 in medicine

The ACRC plans to utilize this significantly expanded pool of Citizen Counselors to operate dedicated task forces for each type of unusual petitions. These task forces will connect ACRC investigators, Citizen Counselors, and agency representatives based on the nature and causes of the petitions. This approach aims not only to respond effectively to petitions but also to actively resolve them through communication and active listening, helping petitioners return to their daily lives.

Chairperson Jung Il Yeon of the ACRC stated, “Unusual complaints damage not only public officials but also the general public, consistent efforts are therefore necessary to resolve them.” He added, “I believe the Citizen Counselors will play a significant role in resolving these issues by providing practical assistance to front-line public officials who are struggling with such petitions, and by

maintaining an attitude of communication and active listening toward the petitioners.”

Visually Impaired Individuals Can Now Directly Check the Results of Administrative Appeals with the Newly Launched Voice Support Service

- A service that reads written decisions aloud via QR codes launched on March 6*
- Available at all 90 individual administrative appeal agencies
in addition to the Central Administrative Appeals Commission*

(March 6, 2026, ACRC)

Results of the administrative appeals, which were previously available only in written form, are now available in audio format.

The Central Administrative Appeals Commission (CAAC, Chairperson Cho So Young) under the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Jung Il Yeon) launched a service on March 6 that delivers written decisions of administrative appeals in audio format.

Since the results of the administrative appeals had previously been delivered as paper documents by mail or online, digitally marginalized groups—such as the visually impaired, people with low vision, and the elderly who have difficulty reading small print—faced challenges in understanding the content of the decisions.

The Central Administrative Appeals Commission has therefore introduced TTS (Text-to-Speech) technology within the Online Administrative Appeals System (www.simpan.go.kr). When users scan the QR code printed on the written decision document, they can listen to the entire content, including case information, the substance of the claim, the main text with conclusion, and the grounds for the ruling.

As the new TTS service can be used not only by the CAAC but also by all 90 administrative appeal agencies operating within the Online Administrative Appeals System, it is expected to significantly enhance convenience for citizens filing administrative appeals. The service also carries significant meaning as it marks the executive branch's initiative in offering customized service for the

digitally marginalized at a time when the courts and the Constitutional Court have yet to provide TTS service for their judgments.

Chairperson Cho So Young of the CAAC, said, “With the audio support service, petitioners who have difficulty reading documents can now independently check the results of their administrative appeals.” She added, “We will continue identifying and providing services so that all citizens can conveniently use the administrative appeals system.”

Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, ACRC Held Explanatory Sessions for 17 Provincial and Metropolitan Offices of Education Nationwide

- *ACRC held ‘On-Site Relay Sessions for Integrity Communication’ to mark the 10th anniversary of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act*
- *Sharing operational achievements and providing customized, case-based explanations for the education sector*

(March 12, 2026, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Jung Il Yeon) runs the On-Site Relay Sessions for Integrity Communication for provincial and metropolitan offices of education nationwide from March 12 through May 28. These sessions celebrate the 10th anniversary of the enforcement of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act and aim to raise integrity awareness while supporting the stable settlement of the system within the education sector.

Marking a decade of the Act, the sessions will share the operational achievements of the system and deliver core details and major case studies to ensure the Act is correctly implemented in educational settings.

※ Key content of the relay sessions:

- achievements of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act over the past decade and recent judicial precedents/interpretations by key issues;
- customized case studies for the education sector including managing school sports teams and after-school programs;
- cases reflecting recent trends, such as solicitations via messenger apps, text messages, and SNS;
- on-site Q&A and listening to suggestions

The sessions are to be held 17 times, touring all 17 provincial and metropolitan offices of education while being live-streamed on YouTube to allow participation for those unable to attend in person due to local circumstances.

Min Seong Sim, Director General of the Anti-Corruption Bureau of the ACRC, said, “On the 10th anniversary of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, we have organized a customized communication platform that reflects the unique nature of the education field,” adding that “I hope these relay sessions would provide an opportunity for those involved in the education sector to further spread a culture of integrity and prevent instances where teachers inadvertently violate the law due to a lack of knowledge.”

ACRC Will Provide the Strongest Protection Possible Whether It's Public Interest Report or Corruption Report

– ACRC pushes for amendments to the relevant laws, aiming to unify disparate whistleblower protection institutions across anti-corruption laws to the highest standard

– Partial amendments to the Public Interest Whistleblower Protection Act and the Act on the Prevention of Corruption and the Establishment and Management of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission were approved by the Cabinet on March 10 and will be submitted to the National Assembly

(March 11, 2026, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC, Chairperson Jung Il Yeon) announced that amendments to the Public Interest Whistleblower Protection Act and the Act on the Prevention of Corruption and the Establishment and Management of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (“the Anti-Corruption Act”) were approved by the Cabinet on today March 10.

The ACRC will submit these approved amendments to the National Assembly within March.

While both acts previously maintained their own protection systems for whistleblowers, differences in protection regulations had emerged due to the time gap between their respective enactments.

These amendments aim to prevent confusion caused by these discrepancies between the provisions to protect whistleblowers set forth in the Public Interest Whistleblower Protection Act and the Anti-Corruption Act, and thus provisions have been unified by adopting the strongest protections from each act, ensuring that both public interest and corruption whistleblowers receive a high level of protection.

Key highlights of the Public Interest Whistleblower Protection Act include:

adding provisions to allow whistleblowers to apply for protection measures even where it is anticipated that the whistleblowers would receive disadvantageous measures (Article 17(1) of the revised Act); and establishing a ‘stay of procedures for disadvantageous measures’ to prevent irreparable harm to whistleblowers (Article 22-2 of the revised Act).

Major revisions of the Anti-Corruption Act include: adding a provision of ‘presumption of disadvantageous measures’ for cases involving attempts to identify whistleblowers, interference with reporting, or coercion to withdraw a report (Article 63); and establishing a provision that prohibits claims for damages against corruption whistleblowers (Article 66(5))

<Major Revisions of the Whistleblower Protection Act and Anti-Corruption Act>

	Whistleblower Protection Act	Anti-Corruption Act
Requirements for protection	<p>(Present) Can apply only after receiving disadvantageous treatment</p> <p>(Revised) Can apply even when such treatment is anticipated (Article 17(1) of the revised Act)</p>	<p>Can apply if disadvantageous measures are taken or anticipated on account of reports, etc. (Article 62-2(1))</p>
Stay of disadvantageous measures	<p>Newly established (Article 22-2 of the Revised Act)</p>	<p>Applications may be filed if procedures for disadvantageous measures due to reporting are scheduled, and there is a concern that irreparable harm may occur if left unaddressed (Article 62-5(1))</p>
Presumption of disadvantageous measures	<p>It is presumed that disadvantageous measures occurred when there are attempts to identify whistleblowers, interfere with reports or coerce to withdraw a report, as well as when protection is requested or a lawsuit is filed (Article 23)</p>	<p>(Present) It is presumed that disadvantageous actions were taken only when an application for protective measures such as identity protection is filed or a lawsuit is brought before a court</p> <p>(Revised) Applicable even in cases of attempts to identify the whistleblower, obstruction of reporting, or coercion to withdraw a report (Article 63 of the Revision)</p>
Claims for Damages	<p>The reported person cannot put in a claim of damages against the whistleblower, etc. even when he/she suffered losses (Article 14(5))</p>	<p>Newly established (Article 66(5) of the Revision)</p>

Furthermore, both the amendments to the Public Interest Whistleblower Protection Act and the Anti-Corruption Act established an explicit legal basis for

the ACRC to cover legal fees when internal whistleblowers seek assistance from a lawyer for ‘non-real-name proxy reporting.’

The Vice Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Bureau of the ACRC, Lee Myung Soon, said, “The amendments currently being pursued are aimed at strengthening the whistleblower protection system in full measure,” adding that “We will do our utmost to amend the Whistleblower Protection Act and the Anti-Corruption Act without setbacks while actively cooperating with the National Assembly in the deliberation process of the amendments.”