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Urgency in data protection in consumer finance urged

By **BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT**

With the robust consumer spending in the country, the National Privacy Commission (NPC) has called for urgency in data protection in the consumer finance sector.

NPC Chairman Raymund Liboro made this call during the 15TH Data Protection Officers (DPOs) Assembly on the theme "Data Privacy: Safeguarding trust in consumer finance", which was attended by over 100 DPOs from the consumer finance sector. The assembly aims to encourage compliance awareness, accountability and a sense of urgency within the sector.

Demand for consumer finance services is steadily growing particularly from the small-to-medium scale enterprises in the Philippines, owing to robust business climate and increasing consumer spending. Thus, there is a need for businesses involved in personal and credit loan services to safeguard their customers' trust by ensuring that personal information remains secure against data theft.

Given this strong demand, Liboro has encouraged consumer finance service providers to comply with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act

(DPA) of 2012, emphasizing on the need to mitigate risks as this sector becomes increasingly dependent on advances in technology.

The definitive outcome of compliance is ensuring the consumer finance sector's stability, global competitiveness and continued contribution to national economic progress.

"Data privacy compliance is a must for all organizations that collect and process personal data. Determining your responsibility in protecting such data - from acquisition, storage, and transfer - not only helps your clients have that sense of security but also strengthens your brand as a company that puts their customers above all else," Liboro said.

Highlighting DPO15 is the declaration of a partnership between the NPC and key leaders in the consumer finance industry. This includes global finance technology (fintech) company Home Credit Philippines (HCPH), represented by its president and CEO Annica Witschard, and the Philippine Finance Association led by its president Gerry Verzola. Their support conveys the sector's commitment in building a resilient data privacy culture in the Philippines.

"As a fintech company, the more data we have, the better position we are in to

provide people with the financial tools that they need," remarked Witschard. "And this means we have a responsibility to our customers and to the public to keep this data safe and secure. Responsible use of data, one that is fully compliant with the Data Privacy Act, is a must to protect consumers and retain their trust. We are one with the NPC in raising awareness for this law, and we hope that more companies take part in this initiative."

The NPC has been actively promoting compliance to have government and private firms in the Philippines register their data processing systems with the Commission before the March 8 deadline as part of the requirements of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, under section 45 of the implementing rules and regulations.

A study by Social Weather Stations commissioned by the NPC in 2017 showed that 94 percent of Filipinos want to know how businesses would use their personal information.

"It's paramount to install security protocols to ensure that data isn't stolen or illegally shared. This is one key aspect of protecting the integrity of your business. Everyone, especially businesses, has a responsibility to protect personal information," Liboro said.

* DATA PRIVACY
* CONSUMERS