
Overview

Title:

Comparison of Consumer Affairs Center operation in four prefectures of the Shikoku region

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● Abstract

While many prefectures operate consumer affairs centers mainly at the municipal level, Kagawa Prefecture has five prefecture-run consumer affairs centers. The system is similar to a model of a consumer affairs consultation system consolidated on a prefectural level, in that the prefectural government is the main provider of consumer affairs consultation services (referred to below as the “Kagawa Model”).

The International Consumer Policy Research Center at the Consumer Affairs Agency’s Strategic Headquarters for Frontiers of Consumer Policy conducted a study to clarify the effectiveness of the Kagawa Model in consolidating consumer affairs centers and the challenges it faces by comparing the Kagawa Model with the situation in the other three prefectures in Shikoku. The survey consisted of interviews with staff (including Consumer Affairs Center staff) of consumer-related government departments in Kagawa, Tokushima, Ehime, and Kochi Prefectures and all municipalities in each prefecture (17 cities and towns in Kagawa Prefecture, 24 cities, towns and villages in Tokushima Prefecture, 20 cities and towns in Ehime Prefecture, and 34 cities, towns and villages in Kochi Prefecture).

The results of the interviews revealed that in Kagawa Prefecture, in addition to the establishment of consumer affairs centers, the prefectural government is taking various measures, such as enabling the same level of consumer affairs consultation throughout the prefecture by devising ways to assign consumer affairs consultants, and that it is also taking the lead in developing consumer affairs administration, compensating for the administrative burden on the cities and towns. In comparison with other prefectures in Shikoku, the prefecture as a whole has been engaged in a similar level of activities in terms of the main consumer administration tasks carried out by municipalities, especially in terms of the number of consumer affairs consultations and consumer education.

However, if other prefectures wish to adopt the Kagawa Model, there is a risk that the physical distance from residents may become too great, and there may be issues in terms of ensuring that administrative services related to consumer affairs that are tailored to the actual conditions in each region can be sufficiently provided, such as activities to protect elderly consumers and raise awareness to prevent consumer problems. In this respect, in Tokushima, Ehime, and Kochi Prefectures, multiple municipalities have established consumer affairs centers or jointly hired consumer affairs consultants in cooperation with each other to provide consumer affairs consultation over areas larger than single municipalities. These initiatives were found to

have the same advantages as the Kagawa Model in that even residents of municipalities without consumer affairs centers can consult with consumer affairs consultants relatively close to them.

Given these advantages and challenges of the Kagawa Model, it is possible that in other prefectures, rather than prefectures taking the lead in providing consumer affairs consultation for all of their citizens, a more effective system would be to implement consumer affairs consultation and consumer policy on a wide-area basis through collaboration between multiple municipalities. Such a system would also help resolve issues related to consumer affairs consultation in areas where financial constraints and difficulties in securing consumer affairs consultants make it difficult to establish consumer affairs centers at the municipal level.