

MLLC_Fav_SB451

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TO: Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

RE: SB451 Secretary of State - Duties - International Friendship Agreements

The MLLC supports SB451 Secretary of State - Duties - International Friendship Agreements.

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation which improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a voice in the development of public policy affecting the Latino community and the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB451.

For a state as diverse as Maryland, it is crucial we maintain positive relationships with countries around the world. While we live in a society that tends to fear the unknown of immigrants and refugees, Maryland makes strides to be the voice of progress and inclusivity. Our state is home to thousands of migrants from all over the globe and creating an official friendship agreement would strengthen and promote trust with international alliances. The Sister States Program is a network of resources to maintain diplomatic relations and to establish business, cultural and educational exchanges. Currently, the Program has 20 partnerships with 17 different countries; Latin American countries included, Mexico and Peru. The process of forming a sister-state affiliation needs improving to better serve both the state and the interested nation.

SB451 gives authority to the Secretary of State to form and execute International Friendship Agreements. These agreements will serve as a foundation to build a sister-state relationship. We strongly advocate for diversity and the positive impacts multicultural communities can create. This bill aids in building stronger international ties that represent our vibrant communities.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges your favorable report on SB451.

Adm_John Wobensmith_INFO_SB0451

Uploaded by: Wobensmith, John

Position: INFO

SENATE BILL 451

STATE OF MARYLAND

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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LETTER OF INFORMATION

Secretary of State – Duties – International Friendship Agreements
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 13, 2020

John C. Wobensmith, Secretary of State

Section 7–109 of the Annotated Code of Maryland charges the Office of the Secretary of State with the lead responsibility for the maintenance and development of Sister–State relationships.

These Sister State relationships are initiated through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Governor of Maryland and the Governor of the Sister State. The Sister State relationships, otherwise known as sub-national relationships, are increasingly vital to the State of Maryland because they promote Maryland all over the world. The sub-national agreements can assist in initiating economic development as well as promoting educational *and* cultural exchanges. To date, Maryland has 21 Sister States in 20 countries.

Maryland should continue to take advantage in developing these formal relationships. Due to Maryland's proximity to Washington D.C., I have taken full advantage of our location by visiting nearly 80 Ambassadors. One of the many deliverables arising from our efforts was the recent and historic visit by a delegation of over 20 European Union Member State Ambassadors, led by European Union Ambassador Stavros Lambrinidis.

Last week, I facilitated a visit by the 3rd ranking diplomat at the Chinese Embassy. This diplomat visited with House Speaker Jones and Senate President Ferguson. The visit was important because it maintains open lines of communication at the sub-national level when there is so much dysfunction in Washington D.C. Another deliverable of the Sister State program is the Maryland Sister State Legislative Reception. This is a signature event and has become a "go to" reception, not only for Maryland Legislators, but for the international diplomatic corps from Washington D.C.

Over the last five years, Maryland has become very attractive to countries from all over the world, and they want to formalize a sub-national relationship with our State. The Bill before you provides that the Secretary of State shall have the authority to form and execute an International Friendship Agreement. We should be strategic about our relationships and make sure that Maryland has a process, a path if you will, to begin a formal Sister State Memorandum of Understanding.

We take these Sister State relationships very seriously. These MOU's must be more than window dressing. Unfortunately, in the past, some of these Sister States agreements have been just that.

We believe that a process, beginning with a Friendship Agreement, is a prerequisite for Maryland to determine whether a formal Sister State Memorandum of Understanding is a good fit for our State. At the same time it gives the international community an opportunity to develop a less formal relationship with Maryland.

Thank you.

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