

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 339. I am Ardath Cade, Vice Chair of Sister States of Maryland Inc, here on behalf of our entire Board to strongly oppose SB339 which would move the support and oversight of the Sister State programs from the Office of the Secretary of State to the Department of Commerce

What are Sister States? Volunteer citizen groups which develop mutual friendships with an area in another country may seek to be recognized as a formal Sister State relationship. A formal MOU is negotiated between the Governor of Maryland and the international state, defining areas of cooperation between the two, and once signed by both governments the Sister state is recognized and becomes part of the Sister States of Maryland Inc.

Currently Maryland has 15 active sister states spanning 5 continents. The earliest, Anhui Province, China was established 40 years ago, The Hauts-de-France agreement was signed in 2020. (Full list attached). We operate together through Sister States Of Maryland, Inc, a not-for-profit organization, with the board consisting of the chairs of each sister state committee. The Secretary of State is our ex-officio co-chairman.

What do Sister States do? Each committee is different in its activities, with a broad array of projects —in fields including agriculture, rule of law, environment, health, social services, home stays, culture, peer to peer exchanges, transportation, education, and some for mutually-beneficial economic exchange. (Brief sampling of projects attached)

Why should the programs be supported through the Office of the Secretary of State rather than the Department of Commerce?

Many, if not most of the programs involving a Maryland Sister State and its partner state require the involvement of the governments of each. This means involvement of the Embassies, and sometimes complex negotiations and agreements about , for example, a forthcoming bilateral environmental conference, a contribution and transfer of needed health or agricultural equipment, a visit from top officials of sister state governments, etc. In Maryland, as in most states, it is the office of the Secretary of State that handles most of these diplomatic arrangements on behalf of the Governor and the programs of the state. Our Secretary of State and Deputy Secretary of State have strong relationships with many of the Ambassadors in DC and historically our sister state staff have worked closely with their staff to develop the sensitive and often complex details for successful international events. We feel that these strong diplomatic connections are essential to our successful work as Sister States.

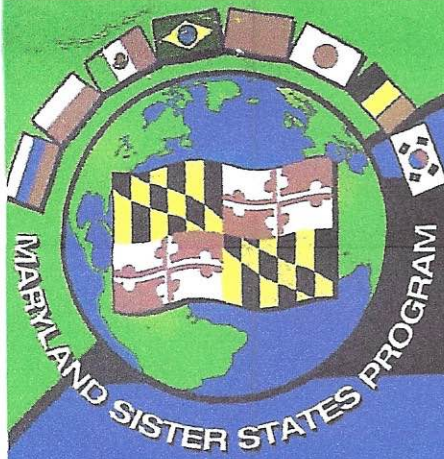
There is a symbiotic and essential relationship between our work as Sister States and the responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary of State., a relationship that does not logically fit with Commerce. This placement has worked well since it began in 2003, why change it? We have not been given any rational for the proposed move and we feel it would be very detrimental to the successful work of our many valuable programs. We see no benefit to the Sister State program from moving it to the Department of Commerce and we strongly urge you to reject and defeat this proposal.

Ardath Cade, Vice Chair, Sister States. Of Maryland, Inc

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MARYLAND SISTER STATES PROGRAM

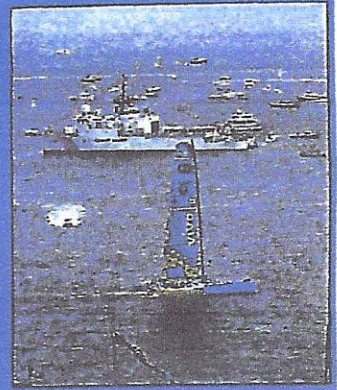
GET INVOLVED!



About the Program

The award-winning Maryland Sister States Program was established in 1980 to provide a forum for the promotion of international cooperation and understanding. Through broad-based citizen participation in a wide variety of exchanges in areas of mutual interest, the Sister States Program offers countless opportunities to develop partnerships around the world in:

- art
- business
- culture
- education
- film
- health care
- law
- professional development
- sports
- transportation
- women's issues, and more.



Maryland's Current Sister States Relationships

- Anhui Province, China 1980
- Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan 1981
- Nord-Pas de Calais, France 1981
- Gyeongsangnam-Do, Korea 1991
- Leningrad Oblast, Russia 1993
- State of Jalisco, Mexico 1993
- Bong and Maryland Counties, Liberia 2007
- Ninh Thuan Province, Vietnam 2011
- Kocaeli Municipality, Turkey 2012
- The Country of Estonia 2009
- Cross River, Nigeria 2013
- Ondo, Nigeria 2013
- KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 2015
- Negev Administrative District, Israel 2016
- Piura Region, Peru 2018
- Hauts-de-France, France 2020

Re:opposition to SB 339-brief sampling of Maryland Sister State projects, developed and carried out by volunteers. 52 page report available

Kanagawa, Japan committee brought two Japanese veterinary students to shadow animal rescue organizations, to promote improved animal rescue programs in Japan.

Negev Israel committee in cooperation with the Department of Environment presented a 130 person Maryland Israel Water Conference:Water Reuse and Security.I water quality conference and produced "Remembrance and Rescue" exhibition, coinciding with the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Leningrad Russian committee annually provides home.stays and weeklong visitation programs for young Russian professionals selected through the Library of Congress, with recent subjects; waste management, laws and programs in support of the disabled, small community elected officials issues.

Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa committee, received a grant from the US Embassy in South Africa to research and curate exhibition on "Contributions of the United States to the Anti-Apartheid Movement" in conjunction with the Apartheid Museum in South Africa.which will launch at the Reginald Lewis museum in Baltimore

Through the Sister States of Maryland Education Committee virtual joint student projects have been activated between various Maryland schools and the Bong and Maryland Liberia Committee, the Leningrad Committee and the South Korea committee, including teacher training program to assist in the success .

The Hauts-de-France Committee is in discussion with their sister government on cyber security as a potential matter for economic cooperation. They are working with the Dept of Agriculture in regard to a planned equine mission to St. Omer

Kocaeli Turkey committee facilitated promotion of cargo traffic between Turkish. Airlines and the US and promoted Turkish products including wine and olive oil

The Ninh Thuan Vietnam committee facilitated a cooperative agreement between University of Baltimore and Pusan Yangsan Hospital

The Estonia had generated several sister city relationships and has partnered with the Estonian national guard for many years.

Anhui, China committee hosted large125 person delegation from Anhui for "Maryland-Anhui Promotion week" , re education, culture art and business.