

SB 339_Sister States_Support.pdf

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Position: FAV



Larry Hogan | Governor
Boyd Rutherford | Lt. Governor
Kelly M. Schulz | Secretary of Commerce

DATE: January 14, 2021 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Judicial Proceedings
BILL NO: Senate Bill 339
BILL TITLE: Department of Commerce – Sister-State Relationships – Maintenance and Development
POSITION: Support

The Maryland Department of Commerce supports Senate Bill 339 – Transfer of Maryland Sister-State Program

Bill Summary:

SB 339 transfers the existing Sister States program by reassigning the program from the Office of the Secretary of State (OSOS) to the Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce). The transfer will not have any fiscal impact as the staff associated with the program have already been reassigned to Commerce as of July 1, 2020 utilizing existing vacant pins, as part of cost-saving measures approved by the Board of Public Works.

Background:

The Sister States Program is the conduit for the formal Governor to Governor relationship between Maryland and its international Sister States. The Program is a vital and active network of Marylanders, which serves as a clearinghouse of international resources. The Program oversees an array of international exchanges, promoting a balance of business, educational and cultural interests.

The Sister States Program:

- Maintains diplomatic relations with our Sister States.
- Matchmakes between Marylanders and the Sister States.
- Works with Marylanders and the Sister States to develop and maintain business, cultural and educational exchanges.
- Hosts and co-sponsors networking and informational events.
- Serves as a clearinghouse for information and contacts related to the Sister States.

Working with Committees organized for each Sister State, the Sister States Program strategically develops exchanges to create well-balanced relationships. Exchanges can be initiated by Maryland citizens or organizations, the international Sister States or the Sister States Program.

The Maryland Sister States Program works with Maryland companies, educational institutions, non-profit organizations and individual citizens. Through high-level government connections and the history and friendship that tie Sister State relationships together, Marylanders enjoy an international entrée on a local level that is unparalleled.

The program in Maryland was established in 1980. Maryland currently has sister-state relationships with 18 countries through 21 partnerships in Brazil, Belgium, China, Estonia, France, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and Vietnam.

The program was run contractually by the World Trade Center Institute (WTCI) from FY1998 until 2003. Prior to 1998, the day-to-day operations were handled by DBED (the predecessor to the Department of Commerce). In 2004, the program was transferred to the Office of the Secretary of State. The program's only funds were for the two staff who have since been reassigned to Commerce as of July 1, 2020 utilizing existing vacant pins, as part of cost-saving measures approved by the Board of Public Works, thus triggering the need to align the statute with current operations.

Rationale:

Commerce and the former International Division within the OSOS have always worked collaboratively. Commerce has provided resources to support the Sister States program in the past, and both offices have found much overlap in their activities over the years. Given the history that this program has with Commerce, we feel our agency is a logical fit for this program in the long term. In fact, the transfer of the staff has been a very smooth process and the two teams work together even better now as a single team. In addition, the reassignment of the staff from the International Division of the OSOS has helped to streamline the international activities of the State as we have found more efficiency by merging similar activities, can ensure more complete documentation of State international programs, can coordinate better coverage for international activities, and can eliminate duplicative activities when working as a single team. Commerce is also able to provide more substantive resources to this program than existed within the OSOS, utilizing existing budget from the Office of International Investment and Trade.

We feel strongly that the collaboration that is possible by transferring this program within the State's existing International Office would have many benefits, beyond increasing efficiencies. The Sister States program focuses on cultural, diplomatic, and educational activities in addition to economic activities. The Maryland Office of Tourism, the Maryland Office of Film, the Maryland State Arts Council, and the Office of Strategic Industries are all key resources for furthering Sister States programs, and these all housed within Commerce. This would strengthen the opportunities for cultural programs. In addition, the Sister States program has positive economic impacts on the State – through tourism expenditures, increasing awareness of Maryland overseas, and overall marketing of the State (a core function of the Office of International Investment and Trade). Therefore, the tracking and reporting of these positive outcomes with other State offices focused on these activities would also be enhanced by the completion of this transfer.

At the Board of Public Works meeting held July 1, 2020, the Board decided as part of the budget reductions to eliminate the International Division within the Office of the Secretary of State. The two staff members covering the Sister States program were reassigned to Commerce's Office of International Investment and Trade. However, the Sister States Program remains legislatively assigned to the OSOS, which is disruptive and inefficient for day-to-day operations as the associated staff required to manage the program are located within another agency. This has

resulted in the program having a de facto split management, as the staff now report to Commerce but must also report to the OSOS as that office manages the program that they support.

We are seeking this transfer in order to support the continuity of operations of the Sister State program, which has demonstrated benefits to the State of Maryland. We would like to assure the legislature that if the Sister states program relocates to Commerce, it would continue to have the freedom to pursue other diplomatic, cultural, and educational activities, just as it did when it was previously housed within the State's economic agency. Commerce recognizes and values these non-Commerce functions of the Sister State program, because it open doors to not only the partner regions, but also to entire countries, which has numerous benefits for the State of Maryland including, for example, identifying investment deals through these long-lasting friendships.

However, as there is no longer budget assigned to the OSOS to support the staff required to manage the Sister States program, if SB 339 does not pass, this would threaten the long term viability of the program as Maryland would no longer have a clear organizational structure for the program. We feel that this program has numerous benefits, across a wide range of sectors, and serves the people of the State of Maryland through the cultivation of deep international ties.

Commerce respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 339.

SB 339 - Letter of Support from Secretary of State

Uploaded by: Wobensmith, John

Position: FAV

STATE OF MARYLAND

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
LT. GOVERNOR



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
STATE HOUSE

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401
(410) 974-5521
TOLL FREE 888-874-0013
FAX (410) 974-5190
TDD: 800-735-2258

JOHN C. WOBENSMITH
SECRETARY OF STATE

January 12, 2021

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Support - SB 339 - Sister-State Relationships - Maintenance and Development

Dear Senator Smith:

The Sister-States program is a vital international program of the State of Maryland. I have been honored to be a part of this program, and work with the amazing individuals that make up our Sister-State committees for the past six years. This program adds a depth to our international partnerships across the globe that no other program does, and the people of Maryland surely benefit from the diplomatic, cultural, educational, and economic ties this program has developed over the past 40 years.

I am pleased that the State was able to maintain the two staff members from this office by reassigning them to Commerce, which has allowed the day-to-day management of the Sister-States relationships to continue.

Commerce has played a role alongside the Office of the Secretary of State in our Sister-State activities - such as co-hosting delegations, organizing joint business events with embassies, coordinating with our Sister States when traveling overseas, and participating in Sister-State MOU signings. I look forward to them continuing to support this program.

As Secretary of State, I remain committed to advancing Maryland's international relationships. I support any decision on the Sister-State Program made by the Governor and Legislature to maintain a robust Sister-State Program and will actively assist with any necessary transition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John C. Wobensmith".

John C. Wobensmith
Secretary of State

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Uploaded by: cade, ardash

Position: UNF

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

ardathcade@aol.com, 410-647-7882, 410-991-9383

MARYLAND SISTER STATES PROGRAM

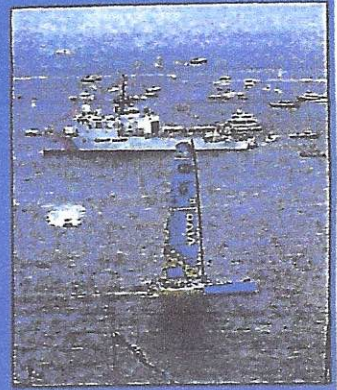
GET INVOLVED!



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.

sister-state-letter-committees.pdf

Uploaded by: Lawrence, Roger

Position: UNF



Maryland-Kanagawa Sister State Committee

**STATEMENT TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE,
IN OPPOSITION TO SB 339
(HEARING JANUARY 14, 2021)**

January 10, 2021

Esteemed Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of the membership of the Maryland-Kanagawa Sister State Committee, I am writing this letter in strong opposition to Senate Bill 339.

Sister States of Maryland must remain in the International Division of Maryland's Office of the Secretary of State because its focus and mission matches with the Division of the Office better than the Department of Commerce. Sister States of Maryland's activities are not limited to business development between our two states but they include educational and cultural exchanges. For example, Maryland-Kanagawa Committee has an exchange program between high schools which the students from Japan visit to Maryland every March and those from Maryland visit to Japan every June. In addition, our Committee has a few programs that bring high school students to study English at UMBC and a few students from UMBC have invaluable opportunity to do internship as assistant teachers for English education at high schools in Kanagawa. Of course, the committee has been making efforts of developing business opportunities for both Maryland biomedical companies and Japanese counterparts. We had organized a few webinars for Kanagawa and Maryland companies in the past as well as a future webinar to introduce Maryland biotech companies to Japanese biotech companies, coordinating with the Department of Commerce.

The International Division of Maryland's Office of the Secretary of State has been the anchor of our activities, in particular, to communicate with the Kanagawa Governor's Office as well as the Embassy of Japan. Secretary of State John Wobensmith and Deputy Secretary Luis Borunda have wide knowledge of our activities and they are valuable people along with the office staff members for us to carry out our mission as the sister state committee. Without their commitment to Sister States of Maryland, the program, which includes around 20 relationships, has to depend on volunteer committee members to handle enormous workload, which would cause delays of communication, reduction of activities and might end up with inactive relationships.

We understand the importance of business development in Maryland, particularly, trading with those in foreign countries, however, relationships should be built among people understanding the other's culture through grassroot activities along with business. The International Division of Maryland's Office of the Secretary of State has the holistic view of relationship between two countries which benefits the Sister States of Maryland activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tomoko Hoogenboom", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tomoko Hoogenboom, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Maryland-Kanagawa Sister State Committee



**STATEMENT TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE,
IN OPPOSITION TO SB 339
(HEARING JANUARY 14, 2021)**

January 8, 2021

Esteemed Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of the membership of the Maryland-Israel Sister State Committee, I am writing in strong opposition to Senate Bill 339.

Responsibility for maintenance and development of Maryland's sister-state relationships must NOT be transferred from the Secretary of State. The activities of our sister states go well beyond the focus and mission of the Department of Commerce. This past year, for example, our Committee commemorated the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz with a month of events that brought together over a thousand citizens of Maryland along with dignitaries from the Embassies of Albania, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Israel, Japan, Serbia, Poland, as well as international NGOs representing Guatemala, Turkey, Russia, China and South Africa. We were also honored to host a multitude of officials from the Governments of the City of Gaithersburg, Montgomery County, the District of Columbia, the Maryland General Assembly, 7 Maryland state agencies, and 5 federal agencies of the United States of America. Programs such as the above-mentioned are valuable relationship-building activities that would be neglected if not eradicated by the Office of International Trade.

Conversely, the Department of State is to be credited for building a robust, diversified and highly successful network and system for conducting Maryland's subnational diplomatic relations – all while working with the minimal budget appropriated to them. Secretary of State John Wobensmith and Deputy Secretary Luis Borunda are international statesmen of the highest caliber. Without the gravitas, acumen and commitment of these two respected leaders, our two dozen sister state committees would be loath to shoulder the enormous workload we necessarily undertake as volunteers to promote the good name of Maryland around the globe.

In our work, we do see tremendous opportunities for Maryland's international business development, but the proper manner to exploit them is to foster cooperation between Commerce and State, not to steal from State to give to Commerce. Allow our non-commercial programs to continue through State, and we can simultaneously generate leads for Commerce. We should have all hands on deck to create business for Maryland, not just Commerce. There is great further potential for our programs to benefit Maryland trade provided that the legislature resists removing the Golden Goose from its rightful nest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "H. Randall Morgan, Jr.".

H. Randall Morgan, Jr.
Chairman, Maryland-Israel Sister State Committee



SisterStates

M A R Y L A N D

Statement to the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Regarding Opposition of MD-Anhui Sister State Committee to SB 339 (Hearing on January 14, 2021)

January 10, 2021

Dear Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the leadership and membership of the Maryland-Anhui Sister State Committee, I am writing in opposition to Maryland Senate Bill 399, and urge you to reject this legislation, which would move responsibility for Sister States of Maryland, Inc., and our Committee from the Office of the Maryland Secretary of State to the Maryland Department of Commerce.

For more than 40 years, the Maryland-Anhui Sister State Committee – comprising Maryland citizen-volunteers from throughout the state – has relied on the leadership, support and assistance of the Office of the Maryland Secretary of State and its able staff to help develop and grow the state-to-province relationship into a model many other sister state arrangements here in Maryland and throughout the United States wish to emulate. Why? Because the *sister state relationship has paid dividends for citizens from both sides – not only in terms of enhanced trade and mutually beneficial economic development opportunities, but in terms of valuable exchanges in education and culture as well.*

Such is the significance of the Maryland-Anhui sister state relationship that Governor Larry Hogan and other Maryland officials will join with their counterparts in early February for a virtual, 40th anniversary commemoration.

Responsibility for maintenance and development of Maryland's sister-state relationships should NOT be transferred from the Office of the Secretary of State to the Department of Commerce. The activities of our sister states go well beyond the focus and mission of the Department of Commerce. In 2018, for example, the Maryland-Anhui Sister State Committee welcomed a 125-person delegation from Anhui Province for a weeklong "Maryland-Anhui Promotion Week," which included important exchanges between and among government, education (both K-12 and post-secondary), culture and art, as well as business organizations.

At the same time, the Maryland Office of the Secretary of State – particularly under the leadership of current Secretary of State John Wobensmith and Deputy Secretary of State Luis Borunda, has built a robust, diversified and highly successful network for conducting Maryland's subnational diplomatic relations – which in turn has raised the visibility and enhanced the value of the work of the Maryland-Anhui Sister State Committee and the 20 other sister state committees which comprise Sister States of Maryland, Inc.

The work of the Maryland-Anhui Sister State Committee and of Sister States of Maryland, Inc. can – and has – generated fruitful business and trade opportunities for Maryland. But our work is about so much more than that. And that is why coordination and responsibility for our work should remain with the Office of the Maryland Secretary of State. Please ensure it remains that way and reject SB 339.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Regards,

Steven Drake

Chair

Maryland-Anhui (China) Sister State Committee



MARYLAND SISTER STATES PROGRAM

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
STATE HOUSE, ANNAPOLIS, MD 21401
410-974-5521
TOLL FREE 888-874-0013
FAX 410-974-5190
TDD 800-735-2258

Maryland/KwaZulu-Natal Sister State Committee
Jean Bailey, Ph.D., Chairperson
Phone: +1 202.421.5552
Email: jeanbaileyphd@aol.com

January 11, 2021

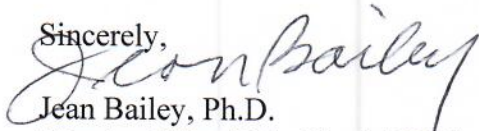
Dear Esteemed Members of the Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee:

I write on behalf of the Sister States of Maryland Program, Inc. (MSSP) in strong opposition to the Senate Bill 339, proposing the decision to move operations and oversight of the organization from the Governor's subcabinet of International Affairs to the subcabinet of Commerce. Since 1980, MSSP, with vital support of the Office of the Secretary of State, has forged long lasting diplomatic, educational, health, cultural as well as business exchanges opening dialogue and leading to Sister State partnerships invested in global strategies of collaboration for Marylanders and their Sister States. The conception and core work of Sister States has been to advance diplomacy, forge international partnerships, and advance networks across sectors. This does not fall solely under the Division of Commerce and to consolidate programming into the Commerce Department would greatly neglect outreach, opportunity, and service of these missions.

I strongly support the continued structure and relationship within the Office of International Affairs. Secretary of State, John Wobensmith and Deputy Secretary Luis Borunda have been instrumental in continuing to build on the legacy of generative programming created with a focus on diplomacy through international bonds which reflect the unique experiences of Sister States programs. While commerce has been one of the advancements of MSSP, it would be a limitation to divert efforts solely to this division. Our work has been both vast and diverse in communities and our accomplishments come from the unwavering support of the Office of the Secretary of State. The value of our volunteer Board of Directors and Committees with varied backgrounds/expertise has been key to attracting and building partnerships with a multitude of institutions, dignitaries, and officials. As Chair of the Maryland/KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Sister State Committee, I have been able to partner and organize numerous mutually beneficial activities, especially in the areas of a) Cultural Exchanges; b) Increasing Educational Opportunities; and c) Improving Health and Human Services.

Through this letter, we aim to draw the severest opposition to SB Senate Bill 339. In our work, we do see tremendous opportunities for Maryland's international business development, but the proper manner to exploit them is to foster cooperation between Commerce and State, not to foster competition between the various departments in the International Division and Commerce. Allow our non-commercial programs to continue through State, and we can simultaneously generate leads for Commerce. We should have all hands-on deck to create business for Maryland, not just Commerce. There is great further potential for our programs to benefit Maryland trade provided that the legislature resists destabilizing that success with this move.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jean Bailey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Jean Bailey, Ph.D.

Maryland/KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa Sister State Committee
jeanbaileyphd@gmail.com



Maryland Estonia Exchange Council, Inc.

(MEEC, a non profit NGO)

Member of the Secretary of State's Sister State Program

Associated with the National Guard's State Partnership Program

Using the "principles" of the Council of European Municipalities & Regions (CEMR) as "guidance"

<http://www.marylandestoniaexchangeCouncil.org> 301-332-5640 (After 9:30 AM) mdeso@starpower.com

Thursday, 14 January 2021

STATEMENT TO SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE, IN OPPOSITION TO SB 339 (HEARING 14 JAN 2021):

I, Colonel (Retired) Milton P. Davis, as one of the two members of the Maryland Sister States Board representing the Sister State relationship between Maryland and Estonia plus as the Executive Director of the Maryland Estonia Exchange Council, Inc. (MEEC, a nonprofit NGO), want to state that I strongly disagree with Senate Bill 339 (SB 339 is designed to move the responsibilities of the management of the Sister State Program from Office of the Maryland Secretary of State to the MD Department of Commerce).

I base my feelings and concerns on my education, training, experiences, travel, and previous positions. I have published five academic articles and have three degrees covering most/all parts of the social sciences with emphasis always on European Studies but not all were the normal historical and political studies since some were sociology, a lot of geography and included a MA in economics/finance which means even though one might think of me as a political historian specializing on Europe, I do have an appreciation for commerce and the things that the MD Department of Commerce are involved with.

In addition the army trained me in military intelligence allowing me to become a Foreign Area Officer specializing on Europe (FAOE). I have traveled a lot in 18 European countries (including living for a short time in Britain and 49 years ago marrying an English lady in England. My army career included active, reserve, guard, full time guard as a technician, and over 17 years in AGR status (active-guard-reserve). During this career of over 30 years I was very involved with the beginning of the State Partnership Program (SPP) between the National Guard of states in the US and the Home Guard of countries in Europe especially Estonia-Maryland and to a much lesser extent Latvia-Michigan, Lithuania-Pennsylvania, Poland-Illinois, & Norway-Minnesota (at the end of the Cold War, in the beginning, the project only linked US states and European countries, but now there are links to countries all over the world).

Soon after the program got started, over 20 years ago, General Fretterd, MDNG Adjutant General, asked me to get involved and to try to expand the program to civilian links. We were able to gradually modify the link between the MDNG and the Estonian Defense League/Home Guard (Kaitseliit) to include links between cities, counties, universities, clubs, etc. During this timeframe I looked at other international linkages within Maryland and found that there were some sister cities, sister states, etc. but that there was no state wide coordinating body for the sister cities and a very weak coordinating body for the sister states under the "umbrella" of the Maryland Department of Commerce.

This program was not very satisfactory because the only interest was in linkages that were business related. I was told by one official that they were not interested in a link to Estonia since it was so small; they were only interested in big links like with China, Russia, etc. I am not anti-business, but even though I have a MA in economics, one quickly learns that most successful international links have to have a cultural, historical, social foundation to be successful. Once a linkage is successful, economic and business connections can be added to it, but they should not be the foundation!

Through no action of mine, at this time frame of approximately 15+ years ago the Sister State's Program in Maryland was moved from the Commerce Department to the Secretary of States' Office and immediately started to improve considerably!

I retired from the Army and the MDNG in June 2002 and stayed involved with the project as a state employee for nine more months in the MD Military Department until General Fretterd retired and I became a total civilian in March 2003. At this time, with the "blessing" of the US State Department (including a little financial assistance) the president of the Baltimore Estonian Society, Toivo

Tagamets (who later became president of MEEC), and myself working with some others like the President of Garrett Community College, a professor at Baltimore County Community College, a professor at Salisbury University, the managing director of the Rockville based Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC), representatives from some cities (Annapolis, Salisbury, Oakland, Cumberland, etc.) and others from around the state like Southern Maryland, Harford County, Carroll County, and Frostburg State began the forming of a nonprofit NGO which eventually became the Maryland Estonia Exchange Council (MEEC).

Once the Sister State Program was within the office of the MD Secretary of State, I did find assistance especially from a new individual working there, Ms. Mendy Nitsch. The civilian MD-Estonia link was set up in a temporary fashion in 2006 and became an official state link (technically linking the largest and most populated county in Estonia to Maryland) in 2009.

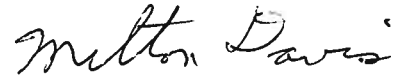
With the great help of the Office of the Secretary of State over several years the link between MD and Estonia has become much stronger allowing some of the individual parts to become very well connected like Bel Air/Narva, Salisbury University/Tartu University, etc. Thanks to the diplomatic skills of Secretary John Wobensmith and Deputy Secretary Luis Borunda in 2019 the official link between MD and Estonia became one of the unique programs in America where a whole country (not just part of the country) is officially linked to a state. Only two other states have something slightly similar to this including the military and civilian links (Illinois-Poland and Minnesota-Norway)!

The Sister State program does NOT need to go back to the MD Department of Commerce, but needs to stay within the Office of the MD Secretary of State. Now to get more financial links between MD and other countries, a closer cooperation needs to be developed between the office of the MD Secretary of State and the MD Department of Commerce with maybe an additional full time employee hired in each office or a "fellowship student" dealing with this issue placed in each office. In addition when the Sister State Committee meets (about three/four times per year), Commerce could have someone in attendance like the Office of the Secretary of State always has someone in attendance!

I know that is hard for a lot of Americans to understand this but there is a lot more to positive international friendliness than just business connections! Maryland is presently doing very well in this area, we do not need to set the whole program backwoods by changing the set up back to the way it once was which did not seem to be very productive!

Questions?

Thank you,



Milton P. Davis
Colonel (Retired) USA
Executive Director

SB339. Unfavorable Testimony 011421.pdf

Uploaded by: Willis, John

Position: UNF



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Proceedings Committee Hearing am, January 14, 2021

Testimony in Opposition to SB 339

Good day Mr. Chairman and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer written and oral testimony on Senate Bill 339.

It was my privilege and honor to serve as the Maryland Secretary of State from 1995 to 2003. One of the duties and responsibilities I had as secretary of state was participation in the numerous, varied activities of the Maryland Sister State program. The Sister State program, first established in 1980, is an important part of the international affairs of the Maryland Office of Secretary of State.

The premise of SB 339 is flawed insofar as the Sister State program, in Maryland and throughout the country, involves far more than economic transactions and business development. The Sister State program fosters and encourages understanding among people and governments through cultural, diplomatic, educational, governmental, political, social, and technical exchanges as well as business relationships. Lifetime relationships between and among individuals and groups are created benefiting not only the individuals but also the participating, groups, organizations and governments.

As Maryland Secretary of State I was active in the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS, the oldest intergovernmental organization in the United States dating to 1905), and co-chaired the NASS International Relations Committee. A regular part of the NASS annual meetings and activities is the promotion of international affairs. As secretary of state, I supported the efforts of the U.S. State Department in working with foreign governments and interacted with foreign embassies and consulates on behalf of the State of Maryland.

During my tenure as Maryland Secretary of State, the Governor's SubCabinet for International Affairs was established in 2001 in an effort to organize and coordinate the various international activities of state agencies. See Governor's Executive Order 01.01.2005.24 Governor's Subcabinet for International Affairs (Amends Executive Order 01.01.2001.20).

There is no public policy benefit in fracturing the international affairs of the State of Maryland by transferring the Sister State program to the Department of Commerce and, in fact, such a transfer would harm the state's international relationships and standing. Therefore, I submit this written testimony in opposition to SB 339 and urge that this committee act unfavorably on the proposed bill.

Respectfully submitted,

John T. Willis
Maryland Secretary of State, 1995-2003.