



The Sister City Uniformity Act of 2025

Contact:
ssorleahcim@comcast.net

PROBLEM:

The problem is fourfold:

- a) Several of the Nation's cities have established diplomatic relations with political entities that the United States does not have diplomatic relations or ties with (e.g., Cuba, Iran, and the Palestinian Authority).
- b) There are no national or state guidelines for establishing diplomatic relations through Sister City programs.
- c) This program has the potential to enhance economic and social relations but, in many instances, inadvertently rewards entities that may not align with U.S. values.
- d) There is a shortage of funding available for these programs, hindering their growth and oversight.

EXAMPLE:

According to the Sister Cities International website (<http://www.sistercities.org>), American cities have partnerships with international cities spanning from Albania to Zimbabwe. However, the list includes cities located in countries with which the United States lacks diplomatic relations. Examples include:

- a) Tehran, Iran
- b) Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, and
- c) Bethlehem, Palestinian Authority

SOLUTION:

1. Establish uniform standards and qualifications for the nation's Sister City programs.
2. Create financing mechanisms to attract donors to the program while promoting American markets.
3. Fund start-up programs that meet established standards.

SUPPORT:

1. Sister Cities International and other Sister City Projects
2. Various nonprofit organizations statewide and nationwide that participate in the program
3. America's business community
4. Local governments
5. Specific ethnic populations
6. Local residents who oppose certain partnerships or city selections

OPPOSITION:

1. Franchise Tax Board (concerns related to costs)
2. International cities currently part of the program whose status may be jeopardized by new standards

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:

1. The program supports America’s international allies and strengthens partnerships, fostering cultural understanding and economic cooperation.
2. Private donations can serve as the primary funding source, reducing reliance on taxpayer money and encouraging civic engagement.
3. Expanding international friendships enhances America’s global reputation, strengthens trade relations, and opens markets for American businesses.
4. Establishing clear standards ensures compliance with U.S. foreign policy objectives, protecting national security interests while promoting democratic values.
5. Sister City partnerships align with economic missions, boosting tourism, trade, and investment opportunities through structured programs.
6. Encouraging partnerships with democratically elected governments fosters global stability and highlights America’s commitment to democratic principles.
7. Creating financial incentives for donations promotes broader public participation and increases program sustainability.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:

1. Implementing this program will require funding, which states may struggle to allocate amid competing budget priorities.
2. Establishing uniform standards may create additional administrative burdens, slowing down approvals and increasing bureaucracy.
3. Requiring partnerships to align with U.S. diplomatic relations may lead to the exclusion of valuable cultural and economic exchanges with non-aligned countries.
4. Smaller cities may face difficulties meeting stringent standards, limiting participation and diminishing program diversity.
5. Dependence on private donations could lead to funding disparities, favoring wealthier cities and disadvantaging less affluent ones.
6. Shifting the program’s focus may alienate existing international partners, leading to diplomatic tensions or cancellations of long-standing relationships.

PUBLICITY:

- International coverage through diplomatic channels
- Local government announcements and outreach campaigns

HISTORY:

- No known introduction of uniform national standards to date.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The estimated cost for California alone is approximately \$2 million over 10 years:

- a) Initial costs include fees to formalize partnerships and establish compliance standards.
- b) Long-term benefits include reimbursement as diplomatic and economic relations expand.

CODE SECTION AFFECTED:

- As per Counsel guidance

LANGUAGE ATTACHED:

1. Intent Language:
 - a. Establishing communications and friendships fosters long-term relationships.
 - b. Economic and social ties often follow once “friendships” between political entities are formed.
 - c. The United States supports peace-loving, democratically elected governments that respect citizens' rights.

- d. Strong international alliances enhance U.S. security at home.
2. Proposed Language:
 1. a. Provide a special tax benefit for donors contributing to Sister City projects.
 2. b. Include a tax check-off box on state tax forms to encourage contributions.
 3. c. Offer state-matching donations for eligible Sister City programs, covering up to 50% of costs after cities raise initial funding.
3. Criteria for Establishing Relations:
 1. a. Must be a United Nations member state.
 2. b. Must have diplomatic relations with the United States.
 3. c. Must maintain diplomatic relations with neighboring countries.
 4. d. Must have an embassy presence in California. e. Must support peace initiatives.
 5. f. Must have an internationally recognized government.
 6. g. Must have a democratically elected government. h. Must not be listed on the Federal Government's "Do Not Travel" advisory list (e.g., North Korea, Iran, Cuba).

STATISTICS:

- Over 500 U.S. cities have established Sister City relationships worldwide (Source: <http://www.sistercities.org>).
- Sister Cities International estimates that these partnerships generate millions annually in trade and cultural exchange programs.
- California alone has over 100 partnerships, with key players in agriculture, technology, and education benefiting from these alliances.
- Approximately 15% of Sister City relationships are with cities in developing countries, supporting infrastructure development and humanitarian efforts.