

Representative Darin LaHood
235 South 6th Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701

Dear Representative LaHood,

As a member of First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Illinois, which has a partner church in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, I wish to express my appreciation for your work in Congress. In this spirit, I would like to respectfully request that immediate attention be given to ending the embargo and returning U.S.-Cuba policy toward reconciliation and negotiation.

Our congregation is part of the Cuba Partners Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Presbyterian Churches throughout the United States and Cuba have had a continuous, uninterrupted relationship since the 1890s. In 1985, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba signed a Mutual Mission Agreement that spawned over 90 partnerships between our churches, presbyteries, and synods.

As a result, U.S. Presbyterians have been visiting Cuba and Cuban pastors and congregants have visited the U.S. for decades, giving our church members insights into the daily lives of Cubans including the hardships they have endured as a result of U.S. policy restrictions especially caused by the embargo. **Since the initial conception of our church's relationship with Sancti Spiritus in 2004, we have enjoyed 17 incoming or outgoing delegations to and from Sancti Spiritus involving 54 different people.** During this time, we have witnessed not only the strength, resilience, and inspiring commitment to God's Word of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Cuba, but also the unnecessary hardship and deprivation caused to the Cuban churches and people by U.S. policies of travel restriction, embargo (called a blockade by the Cuban people), and other forms of economic sanction.

I therefore ask you to sign on to the U.S.-Cuba Trade Act of 2021, introduced by Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon, along with Senator Patrick Leahy, Vermont, Senator Richard Durbin, Illinois, and Senator Jeff Merkley, Oregon. We request these U.S.-Cuba policy initiatives not only for our church partnerships but for the Cuban people. Together with our Cuban brothers and sisters in Christ, we seek, as stated in the Biblical text from Micah 6, "to do justice and walk humbly with our God."

Please note the list, on the back of this letter, of 13 reasons why the Cuba embargo/blockade needs to end as soon as possible. We therefore, implore the 117th Congress to take early and substantial steps toward reconciliation and justice between the U.S. and Cuban people including ending the Cuban embargo.

Sincerely,

First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois

Thirteen Rational Reasons the Cuba Embargo/Blockade Should be Terminated

- *The Cuba blockade is a failed foreign policy implemented to destroy the revolutionary Cuban government, which has had the exact opposite outcome leaving the Castro family and subsequent undesirable leaders in power for the past fifty-eight years.
- *Castro, and subsequent Cuban leaders, have successfully blamed the economic problems of Cuba on the US blockade; which many foreign policy experts believe is why they have repeatedly scuttled negotiations on ending.
- *Due to the blockade, Cuba is once again becoming increasingly dependent on Russia. “We call this period a renaissance,” said Aleksandr Bogatyr, Russia’s trade representative in Cuba.
- *It is hypocritical to argue that the blockade is necessary because the Cuban government is not a representative democracy given the fact that the US has supported many brutal dictators friendly to US interests including former dictator General Batista, known to have killed, tortured, and imprisoned as many as 20,000 Cuban political dissenters.
- *A lack of democracy has not kept the US from commercial relations with other nations including communist Russia, China, and Vietnam, so why should Cuba be held to a different standard?
- *It is hypocritical to suggest we cannot lift the embargo because the Cuban government jails too many of its citizens when in fact, the US has a per capita incarceration rate of 716 Prisoners per 100,000 compared to 510 per 100,000 in Cuba.
- *It is ethnocentric to judge the Cuban government as a total failure given the fact that infant mortality rates are higher in the US at 5.80 per 100,000 live births than in Cuba at 4.40 per 100,000 live births and literacy rates are higher in Cuba at 99.7% than in the US at only 86% of the population.
*The blockade prevents many corporations and farmers interested in shipping goods to Cuba from doing so with an estimated cost to the US economy of \$1.2 billion in lost sales of material goods and \$4.84 billion in agricultural exports annually as well as around 6,000 lost jobs.
- *The blockade reduces the opportunities for improvements in democratic reforms and human rights in Cuba, as well as denying the Cuban people access to technology, medicine, and affordable food.
- *Most people in the US are opposed to the blockade with a December, 2016, Pew Research Center Poll (most recent poll data available) reporting 73% of US citizens favoring lifting the embargo, up from 66% just two years earlier, with 62% of Republicans favoring lifting it.
- *Nine US governors signed a letter opposed to the blockade in 2015.
- *Every year since 1992, the General Assembly of the United Nations has overwhelmingly approved a resolution condemning what it calls “the adverse effect of the embargo on the Cuban people,” which most recently passed by a vote of 191 to 2 abstentions (the US and Israel).
- *Many US Christian denominations have passed resolutions demanding the end of the blockade in solidarity with fellow Christians in Cuba. Christ teaches that policies like the blockade, which cause hardship on innocent people, are morally reprehensible and must be challenged and changed.