

Senate Issue Brief

NAFSA

Association of
International Educators

Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act (S. 299)

Request

We urge Senators to cosponsor the bipartisan Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act (S. 299). This bill will make it possible for Americans to travel freely to Cuba, as we can to any other country.

Issue

NAFSA's members are inspired by the conviction that international education—connecting students, scholars, educators, and citizens across borders—is a critical tool for mutual understanding and building a more secure and peaceful world. We believe that travel is inherently educational and a human right, but for a half-century, the U.S. government has restricted travel to Cuba.

Recent public opinion polling shows that 73 percent of Americans, majorities from both parties, agree that it is time for Congress to end the embargo and open the United States up for business and travel with our Cuban neighbors. The Cuban people overwhelmingly support this as well, with 97 percent in favor of ending the embargo. While some restrictions have been eased through executive action, Congress must still act to eliminate the remaining impediments.

Specifically, tourism is still prohibited. Unlike travel to any other country, an American may only travel to Cuba if his or her trip falls within one of twelve permissible categories, such as educational or religious activities or humanitarian projects. Americans who are eligible to travel to Cuba must comply with regulations, such as adhering to a full-time schedule while in the country, and maintaining travel records for five years. These restrictions, coupled with the possibility of prosecution for failing to adhere to the specific terms of the regulations, can have a chilling effect on the ability of Americans to travel to and engage with Cuba. Until these unnecessary burdens are lifted, and *all* U.S. citizens can travel freely to Cuba, the United States will lose out on economic, academic, and diplomatic benefits that stem from engagement with our close neighbor.

Solution

S. 299 would permanently end restrictions on travel to Cuba and on related transactions, such as banking transactions. Lifting these restrictions would facilitate more educational travel between our two countries, foster mutual understanding, and enhance security through strengthened foreign relations in the hemisphere.

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More Information

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