



The City and State Diplomacy Act

Introduced by Senators Chris Murphy and David Perdue

As cities and states wield increasing economic and political power, it is vital to elevate their diplomatic role. California and New York City have larger GDPs than the UK and Spain respectively. Local governments of all sizes have signed hundreds of agreements related to the environment, terrorism, and trade and investment. State and local officials are the future national leaders of this country and our partners overseas. Despite all this, no mechanism exists for coordination among city and state leaders across the globe or to empower cities and states to inform and advance US diplomatic goals while they better the lives of their citizens.

The City and State Diplomacy Act, introduced by Senators Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and David Perdue (R-Ga.), would establish an Office of Subnational Diplomacy within the Department of State to coordinate policy and programs to help mayors and governors engage with their foreign counterparts. The office would be led by an Ambassador-at-Large appointed by the President. This office would maintain international networks, host international fora, and reduce duplication and inefficiency in subnational outreach. This office would better connect US citizens to the policy making process and highlight the local impact of diplomacy. Finally, this office would counterbalance China, who is greatly expanding its subnational diplomacy through various opaquely funded programs. This bill will particularly assist smaller states, cities, and companies that do not have the resources to employ international affairs staff of their own.

The State Department created an Ambassador-at-Large for Liaison with State and Local Government in 1979. Since then, its functions have shifted among stand-alone offices, the Bureau of Public Affairs, and the Bureau of Legislative Affairs. Most recently, an Office of Subnational Diplomacy was created in 2010 but its functions were largely transferred to the Bureau of Public Affairs by the end of 2016. During its existence, the office facilitated trade and investment, provided a liaison function between the State Department and State and local government, and enabled numerous subnational engagements, for example MOUs with Brazil and India.

The House companion bill, HR 3571 was introduced in June 2019. This bill has received widespread support by both foreign policy and state and local government advocates, including the American Foreign Service Association, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the Conference of Mayors, the German Marshall Fund, the State International Development Organizations (SIDO), and Tom Shannon, the former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs.