



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1403**

July 6, 2021

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
United States State Department  
2100 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20535

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Secretary Blinken, Director Wray, and Attorney General Garland,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) attempts to undermine U.S. national security through "sister city" agreements. I ask that your departments and agency ensure federal oversight of Chinese sister city agreements in the United States to limit the CCP's malign influence over our democratic institutions.

Competition with China is not solely a matter for the federal government – it holds serious consequences for all levels of our society, including our state and local governments. The federal government, which is charged with responsibility for national security and foreign relations, must understand how the CCP is using relations with subnational U.S. entities to further its aims.

The Administration has reason to worry as U.S. local entities engage in over 150 unregulated sister city agreements with U.S. cities and other local governments operated through a leading foreign policy arm of the CCP — the China's People's Association for Friendship of Foreign Countries (CPAFFC).<sup>1</sup> General Secretary and President Xi Jinping recently revitalized the role of

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<sup>1</sup> "2018 Annual Impact Report," Sister Cities International, Accessed May 10, 2021, <https://sistercities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-SCI-Impact-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>.

CPAFFC to “groom local business, political, and media leaders in countries worldwide”<sup>2</sup> to build alternative networks of interaction, and sister cities offer the perfect inroads to achieve this aim.

Yet, we are aware of no federal national security agency overseeing sister city agreements involving the CCP. Although Sister Cities International (SCI), a U.S. non-profit organization, serves as the conduit between interested parties, it has no responsibility or capability to manage the risks of these arrangements between foreign governments and American cities and states. This gap provides the CCP leverage to directly negotiate undisclosed agreements with local and state governments, including on matters that touch on topics like Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

Former Secretary of State Michael Pompeo outlined the consequences of unregulated sister city partnerships during the annual National Governors Association meeting in January 2020, warning governors that they should actively work to identify and prevent ways for the CCP to take advantage of state and local governments.<sup>4</sup> Senators Marsha Blackburn, Kevin Cramer, and others have also sounded the alarm on this issue by introducing the Sister City Transparency Act,<sup>5</sup> which would direct the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to undertake an audit on U.S. sister city agreements with CCP entities.

There must be federal oversight of sister cities agreements to ensure that those agreements do not undermine the integrity of our democratic institutions or our national security otherwise.

To address challenges currently presented by sister city partnerships throughout the country, I request a briefing from each of your respective agencies on the following topics:

**State Department:**

1. Please describe what, if any, oversight the State Department is conducting over sister cities agreements between U.S. local and state governments and the CCP.
2. What authorities, if any, does the State Department currently have to undertake this oversight? Are new authorities or resources needed to ensure such oversight is robustly undertaken?
3. Has the State Department contacted SCI, or any state or local government in a sister cities arrangement with the CCP, to seek access to any agreements that exist between them?
4. Has the State Department conducted a security assessment of sister cities arrangements with China to understand what risks they pose? If not, why not?

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<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution), November 29, 2018, p. 30, <https://www.hoover.org/research/chinas-influence-american-interests-promoting-constructive-vigilance>.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, “U.S. States and China Competition,” speech to the National Governors Association Winter Meeting, February 8, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-states-and-the-china-competition/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “S. 710: Sister City Transparency Act,” Congress.gov, Accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/117th-congress/senate-bill/710?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22sister+cities%22%7D&s=1&r=2>.

**Department of Justice:**

1. In addition to federal oversight over future agreements, should SCI register through FARA given its relationship to Chinese government entities including the CCP and CPAFFC?


**Federal Bureau of Investigation:**

1. Has the FBI requested to review, and then reviewed, any agreements between Communist China and U.S. local or state governments that have entered into sister cities agreements?
2. Has the FBI undertaken a counterintelligence risk assessment of how the CCP may be using, or could use, such agreements? If not, why not?
3. Will the FBI brief local and state governments that have entered into sister cities agreements on the national security risks of such agreements? If not, why not?

As Director Wray has noted in previous remarks, there is little doubt that the CCP poses one of the most strategic challenges to the United States,<sup>6</sup> specifically, that the U.S. must have a “whole-of-society” strategy to counter the threat. I urge you to use the full authorities of your departments and agency to deny the CCP any opportunity to subject our democracy to its malign influence.

I look forward to working closely with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

  
JIM BANKS  
Member of Congress

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<sup>6</sup> FBI Director Christopher Wray, “The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States,” speech to the Hudson Institute, July 7, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states>.