Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Damian Suarez, I was born in the Bronx. 

In 2007 I applied to a scholarship program through the NY Inter Religious Foundation for Community Organizations (IFCO), which was recruiting applicants and notifying them of full scholarship offers from the people of Cuba to young women and men from the United States that wanted to pursue a medical career. Our only commitment was to return to our communities and serve. I was accepted. So, from 2008 until my graduation in 2015, I lived and studied in Cuba when I became an MD. I graduated owing no debt! Thanks to the solidarity of the Cuban people and its government.

The Cuban healthcare system is a model of healthcare that works in resource poor places, prevailing despite an unjust embargo being imposed on it. This very model is currently benefitting the people of New York City who seek medical care at Jacobi Medical Center, Montefiore Medical Center, Harlem Hospital, Lincoln Hospital, Wycoff Medical Center, Woodhull Medical Center, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, and Bronx Lebanon Hospital, where they receive treatment by my fellow graduates of Cuba's Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina. The Latin American School of Medicine.

The embargo/blockade, meant to punish the Cuban government, in reality punishes Cuba's people as well as the almost one hundred US citizens studying medicine in Cuba, young US citizens from diverse backgrounds, like myself, who hope to return to their communities to provide quality healthcare for everyone. Restricting the trade of goods, commerce, and the movement of people hurts families both here in the US and in Cuba, and limits our freedoms as US citizens to move freely beyond our borders. I call for the end of the embargo/blockade against Cuba and the lifting of the travel ban. I applaud Councilmembers Inez Barron, Ydanis Rodriguez and Jimmy Van Bramer for having the courage to bring Resolution 1092 before this committee and I encourage every member of the NY City Council to support this symbolic legislation and ask that the entire Council of New York City will the same.
My name is Emily Thomas, and I own a 8 family apartment house at 448 State St, in downtown Brooklyn. So I’m a New York landlord and pay a lot of property taxes. But that’s not why I’m here.

I’m also part of the White Rose Ministry at First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn at 124 Henry Street in Brooklyn Heights. We took our name, White Rose, from the poem written by Jose Marti, a poem which every Cuban school child knows. Marti wrote that he gives a white rose to his friends, but to those who “tear out the heart by which I live, to them also I give a white rose”.

I’m here today to support Bill 1092, which as New Yorkers, we ask our President to stop tearing out the heart of other countries, particularly Cuba.

Our church has been in partnership with a Presbyterian church and two ecumenical projects in Cuba for over 20 years. We have learned from them, and helped them, and grown together. I’ve got a lot of stories! One of our ongoing projects is to fund a feeding program our sister-church runs. With the $3,750 we send them each year, they are able to give lunch five times a week (and a doggy bag) to 14 senior citizens in the neighborhood who live alone. This year, they ran out of money for food. Because of the new economic pressures which the Trump administration is applying on Cuba, the price of food has gone up. We are glad we could send more money down to make up the difference. So those 14 seniors would not go hungry. But what about the others?

The blockade hurts people. That’s its purpose. Cuba has an excellent health system, and on the average, they live longer than we do. But I know people who have died because they could not get medicine, medicine readily available here. It is a mean, spiteful policy, designed to hurt the people of a country which has always given us a white rose.

As Presbyterians, we talk about being called. We are called by our religious teachings, by our moral judgments, to be better than this. Passing this bill is a step on a path toward rectifying a wrong, cleansing a sin. We urge you to not only pass this bill, but come with us to Cuba, to talk to people there, to see for yourself what their life is like under these sanctions. Bring white roses.
RE: RES 1092-End the Embargo Against Cuba and Freedom of US Citizens to Travel

My name is Frances Osaigbovo.

I was born in the Bronx New York. I live in Councilman Ruben Diaz is my representative. In 2009, I was accepted into the IFCO-ELAM Medical School Scholarship program where I was the recipient of a full medical school scholarship. I graduated as a MD in 2015. Without this opportunity as an economically disadvantaged women of African descent, I would never have had the ability to carry out my dreams of becoming a doctor or the opportunity to speak to people in my community in their own language (Spanish).

The Cuban government and its people recognized that there were young people like me who deserved the opportunity to pursue a path that would contribute to healing our communities. It was an honor for me and my other fellow students to study medicine from the greatest doctors in the world. These Cubans were selfless and passionate people who opened their country and gave us resources which they often lacked themselves. These were the types of people that educated us.

As a result of the blockade imposed by the government of my country, often, my professors had to walk miles to school every day because they did not have fuel for their cars. The people of CUBA never turned their backs on anyone when they were in need.

After hurricane Mitch, Cuban doctors went to Honduras and other countries to make sure that the people there received adequate medical care. After the earthquake in Haiti, Cuban doctors immediately offered aid and assistance. When hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, Cuba offered to send support, but the United States rejected the support. And for what? Because of racist laws?

The people of Cuban are strong and brave, but should not suffer because of antiquated and unfair, unjust laws that are based on the foundation of White Supremacy. These selfless people should be honored for what they have contributed to the world. There is no reason they should be punished and strangled financially. Stop the embargo now!

I thank councilmembers Inez Barron, Ydanis Rodriguez and Jimmy Van Bramer for bringing Resolution 1092 before this committee and I encourage every member of the NY City Council to vote for this legislation.

Thank you.

Dr. Frances Osaigbovo
Graduate- Cuba’s ELAM Medical School
October 30, 2019
Bronx, N
NYC Council, Resolution 1092, October 31, 2019

Testimony of Nancy Cabrero

My name is Nancy Cabrero. I am the American-born daughter of parents who left Cuba and settled in Manhattan in 1956. Economic reasons and a chance at the American Dream motivated their migration. They also wanted my brother, who was ten years old at the time, to have access to higher education and tools to fulfill his potential.

Honorable members of the NYC Council, thank you for the opportunity to hear my presentation. I am grateful to be able to express to you how the embargo against Cuba, which is now approaching 60 years, makes it particularly difficult for Americans of Cuban descent like me to establish, bond with, and maintain relations with family members who live in Cuba. For this particular reason, knowing there are so many others, I am here to ask that you open your hearts to understand why it is imperative that the US-imposed embargo against Cuba be lifted immediately.

If you were to take a quick mental inventory of your entire family I bet many extended family members would come to mind who enriched your life in special ways and contributed in a significant way to the person you are today. Unfortunately, this is not something I can do. The embargo, or blockade as it is also referred to, did not allow me to know and feel the unique and special love of a grandparent, refer to anyone as Aunt or Uncle, have a friendship and a connection with a cousin who could also feel as close as a brother or sister, to participate in special and milestone events like birthdays, graduations, weddings, or celebrate holidays and participate in religious occasions. An effect of the blockade, during the sixties and seventies especially, was the prohibitive cost of phone calls to and from the island. Technical connectivity was a challenge and the quality of the call was extremely poor. Even a letter, still to this day, takes a month to be delivered; a response arrives two maybe three months later, if and when it doesn’t get lost in transit. When they’re received, updates shared lovingly in letters are already old news. The obstacles to communicate weigh on each family member—you can’t share stories...
easily, you can’t laugh or cry together, and truly, it’s hard to even really know who they are.

There is tremendous loss in all of this. Like so many other unjust laws that have existed in the law books of this country, these sanctions must be revisited for the purpose of changing them. I have faith and trust in you, the members of the NYC Council, to understand justice and work from a place of love and understand quality of life on a deeper level and use that to change and make new laws. I believe you will see the injustice of this blockade against Cuba and understand that for the reason of family relations and so many other reasons presented today, now is the time to put an end to all inhumane sanctions on Cuba and lift the Cuban blockade.
Greetings. We are both members of NY-NJ CubaSi, a broad coalition of organizations and individuals who for decades have worked for normalization of the United States relations with Cuba in all respects. We write in support of Resolution 1092 calling upon the President to lift the Cuban embargo and end the Cuban Travel Ban. We are submitting this memorandum on the Cuban embargo and the ban on travel to Cuba because we are unable to attend the October 31st as we are traveling to Havana, Cuba to participate in the “International Meeting of Solidarity for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism.” Thank you for holding a public hearing on Resolution 1092, and for accepting testimony electronically.

INTRODUCTION

During the administration of former US President Barak Obama, the US and Cuba commenced steps towards improving relations between the two countries. In November 2014, President Obama and then Cuban President Raúl Castro announced that the two governments would restore full diplomatic ties and ease the more than fifty years of bilateral hostilities. The same day Obama and Castro also announced that they had agreed to an exchange of prisoners, including the remaining incarcerated members of the Cuban Five and the release of Alan Gross, a US contractor on humanitarian grounds. Thereafter, the US took a number of steps towards the relaxation of tensions. These steps included:

- Easing restrictions on travel to Cuba by allowing US citizens to travel to Cuba in groups or individually as long as they fell into one of twelve categories, including the two most popular; “people to people” visits and “support for the Cuban people.”
- Lifting several restrictions affecting the importing and exporting of goods between the US and Cuba;

Prior to the November 2014 announcement, several weeks after taking office in 2009, Obama had eased restrictions on remittances and travel, allowing Cuban Americans to send unlimited funds to Cuba and permitting US citizens to visit Cuba for religious and educational purposes. During the course of his first term, Obama continued to modestly loosen restrictions in these areas.
• Removing Cuba from the US State Department Sponsors of Terrorism List;
• Allowing the Cuban government to open a bank account in the US for purpose of conducting non-cash business transactions, which Cuba had been unable to do since the beginning of the embargo;
• Restoring US commercial airlines flights to Cuba for the first time in fifty years; and
• Authorizing cruise ship operations.

In addition, days before leaving office, President Obama repealed the “wet foot, dry foot” policy, which since its adoption in 1995 allowed Cubans who reached the US shores authorization to pursue permanent residency. The “wet foot, dry foot” policy was viewed by many as discriminatory because it applied only to Cubans, and not to other migrants seeking entrance to the US such as Haitians. President Obama’s repeal of the “wet foot, dry foot” policy brought US treatment of Cubans in line with its treatment of other migrants seeking to enter the US. The steps taken by the Obama administration towards normalization of relations with Cuba, according to the Pew Research Center, were supported by 75% of Americans.2

While campaigning for President, Donald Trump sharply criticized the steps taken by the Obama administration, and vowed that, if he was elected, he would cut through the opening. To this end, Trump and his administration has reversed many of the steps toward normalization taken by the Obama administration. In particular, the Trump administration has, among other things:

• manufactured a crisis to justify of the reduction of staff at the US Embassy in Havana to a skeleton crew and shut down most of its councilor services, including visa processing by charging that staff’s health had been damaged by “sonic waves”; the FBI investigated and discovered no evidence of the alleged “sonic attacks” against U.S. diplomatic personnel in Cuba;
• capped remittances – unlimited under the Obama administration- at $4,000 a year;
• stopped group, educational or cultural, trips or “people to people” visits;
• stopped allowing cruise ships, private yachts or fishing vessels from stopping in Cuba;
• opted not to suspend Title III of Helms-Burton Act which provides US nationals who owned property in Cuba at the time of the Cuban Revolution with a private cause of action to sue in federal district courts any person or entity that knowingly “traffic[s]” or uses property lawfully nationalized by Cuba decades ago;
• cancelled five-year B2 visas for Cuban citizens that allowed for multiple entries for up to three months ;3

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3 As a result of this abrupt change in US visa policies, which was effective two days after it was announced, Cuban citizens can now only obtain visas for one trip to the United States for a three-month period. Because the US embassy in Havana is operating with a skeleton crew and has shut down most of its councilor services, Cubans must not only pay $160 for a US visa but also pay for travel and lodging in a third country, often to see their visa application denied. By contrast,
announced a new policy denying visas to Cuban medical personnel involved in health-related collaborations with more than sixty countries; and
sanctioned companies that participate in the shipment of fuel to Cuba, thereby generating an energy crisis that compelled the Cuban government to take savings and control measures.

suspended flights as of December 10, 2019 of U.S. airlines to all Cuban destinations except Havana Cuba.

The Trump’ administration’s actions in reversing the steps taken by the Obama administration towards normalization are harmful to the economies of the US and Cuba. “Rolling back” the steps taken by the Obama administration, according to Engage Cuba, “could cost US businesses and taxpayers 6.1 billion over the course of . . . [Trump’s] first term and affect 12, 295 jobs across the country. Communities must reliant on the manufacturing, tourism, and shipping industries would be disproportionately affected, especially Gulf states with deep water ports and cruise terminals.”

THE CUBAN EMBARGO SHOULD BE ENDED

Virtually since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959, the United States has unsuccessfully sought through a variety of covert and overt means to overthrow the Cuban government. To this end, most infamously, covertly, the US, attempted to assassinate former Cuban President Fidel Castro over 600 times. Many of these failed assassination attempts were publicly detailed in the Church Senate Committee’s November 1975 interim report on Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders. Most famously, overtly and cruelly, the US, in the hope of starving the Cuban people into rebellion, for nearly sixty years has imposed an economic blockade of Cuba.

applications for a Cuban visa are a mere formality as airlines and travel agencies are authorized to offer visas to anyone traveling at a cost of 50.00, plus the airline processing fee which is part of the traveler’s purchase price of an airline ticket or travel package. Prior to the recent change in B2 visas, thousands of Cuban citizens have come to US on B2 visas to visit their families, shop and engage in cultural or academic exchanges.

The US first imposed an embargo on exports except for food and medicine to Cuba in 1960 under the Eisenhower administration. The embargo was expanded under the Kennedy administration. While the President of the US has the authority to amend regulations that govern certain aspects of trade as well as travel to Cuba, today the embargo is enforced primarily through six federal statues: the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the Cuban Assets Control Regulations of 1963, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (also known as the Helms-Burton Act), and the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000. In short, the ending of Cuba embargo requires the passage of federal bill, signed into law by the President.

The Cuban blockade has long been opposed by a majority of the nations of the world. Indeed, every year since 1992, the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly has passed a resolution declaring the embargo to be a violation of the Charter of the U.N. and international law. During the most recent vote in the United Nations General Assembly, in 2018, on a resolution condemning the blockade, 189 of the 193 members of that body voted in favor of the resolution. Two countries, the United States and Israel, voted against the resolution; two countries, Moldova and the Ukraine did not vote. Opposition to the embargo is not just international but also domestic with reportedly a majority of US citizens opposing it as well.

Notwithstanding the growing opposition to the blockade internationally and domestically, the Trump administration has moved to toughen the blockade. Notably, for the first time since the enactment of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (also known as the Helms-Burton Act), the Trump administration has opted not to suspend Title III of Helms-Burton. Helms-Burton has been widely condemned internationally, including even by US allies because of its limits on the ability of other sovereign nations to trade with Cuba. For example, Helms-Burton was vehemently condemned by both Canada and Mexico, and both countries enacted legislation aimed at blocking or limiting the enforceability of Helms-Burton judgments. 7

Title III of Helms-Burton provides US Nationals who owned property in Cuba at the time of the Cuban Revolution with a private cause of action to sue in federal district courts any person or entity that knowingly “traffics” or uses property lawfully nationalized by Cuba decades ago. Simply put, Cuba’s nationalization of these properties was legal because it was carried out in conformity with International and Cuban laws and many of the owners of the nationalized properties had abandoned it in their flight to the US. Helms-Burton empowers the President to suspend Title III in six-month periods. As previously mentioned, every President since the enactment of Helms-Burton, mindful of the tensions its activation would cause with other nations, including US allies, has suspended its operation twice a year.8


8 See e.g., Peter McKenna, Opinion: Trump, Cuba and Helms-Burton Revisited, The Guardian, January 31, 2019.
The Trump’s administration decisions to partially activate Title III harkens back to the days of the now discredited Monroe Doctrine as it constitutes unlawful interference and meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation in violation of well settled International laws and principles. In addition, this decision will result in the burdening of federal courts with essentially frivolous lawsuits because their judgments will be unenforceable. This is so, first, because the US, to our knowledge, is not a signatory to any international agreement on the reciprocal recognition and enforcement of court judgments. Because the US has not signed such an international instrument, any judgments resulting from Helms-Burton lawsuits will be difficult, if not impossible, to enforce on the basis of comity, particularly in countries with friendly relations with Cuba.

Moreover, as previously noted, in response to Helms-Burton several foreign countries or entities specifically enacted legislation or adopted regulations that render judgments arising under the Helms-Burton Act unenforceable. For example, the European Union Council Regulation No. 2271/96 provides in pertinent part that any “judgment of a court or tribunal . . . [or] of an administrative authority . . . giving effect, directly or indirectly, to the [Helms-Burton Act] or to actions based thereon or resulting there from, shall [not] recognized or be enforceable in any manner.”

The Cuban Embargo is a relic of the “Cold War” and should have ended with it. It is hypocritical for the US to justify the embargo on the grounds that Cuba has engaged in alleged human rights violations, while the US has Saudi Arabia, for example, as a close ally. Cuba clearly poses no threat to the national security of the US. The Cuban embargo is a failed policy. It has not caused the Cuban people to foment a rebellion despite the overwhelming hardships that it has caused. Rather, the United States, in the hope of starving the Cuban people into rebellion and destabilizing the country has been a failed policy. It has not caused the Cuban people to rebel in sixty-years despite the overwhelming hardships that it has intended, as the majority of the Cuban people continue to support the Cuban government’s transition to new forms of economic and social transformation. Cuba is a sovereign nation and should be respected as such by the United States. The embargo also contravenes International law and principles.

The Cuban embargo is harmful to both the people of US and Cuba because it, among other things, inhibits collaborations between the two countries in a number of critical areas, including scientific research, medical care, and environmental protection to the detriment of the people of the US and the people of Cuba. This is evidenced by the number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed during the Obama administration.

In particular, during the Obama administration, Cuba and US signed twenty-four MOUs in areas such as education, medical research, counter-narcotics, and environmental protection. Significantly, the Cuban Ministry of Health and the US Department of Health and Human Services signed an MOU concerning the development of pharmaceuticals for communicable diseases such as Zika and dengue and non-communicable diseases such as cancer. The Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York, for example, commenced an intensive research

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9 See Article 4, EC Regulation 2271/96.
collaboration for clinical trials of the Cuban lung cancer vaccine. In addition, more than a
dozen New York colleges and universities signed MOUs with major Cuban universities,
including the State University of New York at Cortland, SUNY New Paltz and SUNY Potsdam,
the University of Buffalo and Lehman College of the City University of NY.  

The Cuban Travel Ban Should Be Ended

The restrictions on travel to Cuba have existed since 1963, when the Department of
Treasury issued regulations to carry out the embargo. Although the regulations did not explicitly
ban travel to Cuba, they placed restrictions on any financial transactions related to it, effectively
banning travel. In years since, the OFEC regulations pertaining to travel have changed several
times. In 1977, then President Carter lifted the travel ban altogether. Four years later, however,
Ronald Regan reinstated the restrictions on tourist and business travel but allowed continued
travel by Cuban Americans visiting close relatives. George H. W. Bush tightened the
restrictions. Clinton made several changed to the OFEC regulations. The ban on travel was
codified in the Trade Sanctions and Export Act, which was signed into law by Clinton in 2000.
Accordingly, the travel ban can only be entirely lifted by an act of congress signed into law by
the President.

During the Obama administration, as previously mentioned, the restrictions on travel
were eased to allow US citizens to travel to Cuba in groups or individually as long as they fell
into one of twelve categories, including the two most popular; “people to people” visits and
“support for the Cuban people.” Reportedly, over 600,000 US citizens traveled to Cuba in 2018
in groups or individually via airplanes and cruise ships.

Similar to its erasure of the Obama administration relaxation of the embargo, the Trump
administration has also sought to erase the Obama’s relaxation of the ban on travel to Cuba. In
June 2019, the Trump administration stopped group educational or cultural trips or “people to
people” visits. The Trump administration has also banned travel to Cuba on cruises, private
aircraft, yachts and stopped allowing fishing vessels to dock in Cuba. Most recently, in late
October 2019, the Trump administration announced that it was suspending U.S. airlines travel
to nine destination in Cuba. The affected airlines, including American Airlines, Delta and JetBlue

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10 Engage Cuba, “The Economic Impact of Tightening U.S. Regulations on Cuba,” (Washington,
DC: May 31, 2019) at pp 5-6.
11 See e.g., SUNY Cortland signs agreement with two Cuban Universities. Retrieved August 22,
2019. From https://www2.cortland.edu/news/detail.dot?id=452df63b-f58f-4e98-bd99-
a22f4a71adb0: Representatives of the State University of New York sign a memorandum of
understanding with the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education in Havana. Retrieved August 22,
2019. From https://sites.newpaltz.edu/news/2017/03/provost-international-programs-dean-join-
2019. From http://www.lehman.edu/news/Lehman-Launches-Classroom-Partnership-with-
Cuban-Universities.php
12 The United States Supreme Court has considered the ban in two cases and both times upheld
were given 45 days to operations on the island related to these destination. Once this new policy becomes effective in early December 2019, Americans will only be able to travel to one city in Cuba, Havana. The Trump administration’s strengthening of the ban on travel to Cuba will reportedly result in a loss thousands of jobs in the airline and cruise industries and of revenue to the US of millions of dollars.  

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we urge you to vote in favor of Resolution 1092. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about our testimony.

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October 30, 2019

To whom it may concern

My name is Miguel Ernesto Melendez first generation Cuban/Puerto Rican born and educated in the USA.

I would first like to thank the Honorable New York City Council’s Members for bringing this resolution to end the Blockade against Cuba here today for public testimony.

For my testimony I would like to enter into the official record “Resolution 73/8 of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

In this document you will find the economic, social, political and human rights defense of why the blockade must end NOW!

In the document you will find an overwhelmingly amount of the world’s nations calling for the end of the blockade.

The blockade against Cuba qualifies, in conformity with the 1948 Geneva Convention, as a crime of genocide. The blockade … violates the United Nations Charter. It prevents international trade and curtails free navigation. It gets to the point of penalizing the businesspeople from other countries who invest in Cuba.

It is the people of Cuba, with the support of the international community, who will say, ‘Hasta la vista, blockade; hasta la vista, genocide

The United States must cease its aggression against Cuba. It must recognize Cuba’s right to its self-determination. It must allow the Cubans to live in peace. It must recognize that … Cuba is a free and independent country.”

I respectfully submit… “Resolution 73/8 of the United Nations General Assembly

Miguel Ernesto Melendez

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