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Press Statement from Cleveland City Councilman Blaine A. Griffin  
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Cleveland City Councilman Blaine Griffin was the primary sponsor of the resolution calling for an end to the U.S. embargo of Cuba

I am pleased to announce Cleveland City Council passed and Mayor Frank G. Jackson signed into law a resolution which calls for an end to the 60-year-old economic, commercial and financial embargo against the Republic of Cuba and urges the Trump Administration to renew negotiations with the Cuban government and build an ongoing cooperative relationship between the United States and Cuba. The Resolution was co-sponsored by Council Members Matt Zone, Jasmin Santana, Kerry McCormack, and me and passed by Council unanimously. We are pleased Mayor Jackson added his signature to this important statement from the City of Cleveland.

It is unusual for the City of Cleveland to delve into matters of national foreign policy, but we were compelled by the failure of the embargo strategy imposed by our government and believe it was necessary for Council to take this position and appeal for a new policy toward Cuba. Lifting the embargo will empower the Cuban people and open opportunities for businesses in Cleveland and across Ohio.

The failures of the embargo have many perspectives: human rights, economic, and even the health and wellbeing of American citizens. Each of these is worth exploring. The embargo has had a devastating human rights impact on Cuba. By separating Cuba from access to American products, technology, and markets, we have forced the island to purchase food, medicine, and other essential goods from countries whose products do not match ours and are generally more expensive. This has diverted precious Cuban resources away from infrastructure, health care, education, and other social services.

By the same token, the embargo has denied American farmers, ranchers, and other producers access to a vibrant consumer market just 90 miles from our southern border. Cuba imports \$1.8 billion in food and medicine every year of which the United States exports only \$200 million on terms unfavorable to Cuba. If the embargo were lifted, America could supply more of Cuba's food and medicine needs, along with consumer goods and industrial products, which would create billions in new markets for products from America, and most importantly, from Cleveland.

Finally, the embargo denies Americans access to life-saving drugs and therapies. Cuba is an unrecognized world leader in the development of drugs and therapies for cancer, diabetes complications, and most recently for COVID-19. For instance, Cuba's CIGB-258 immunoregulatory peptide and other therapies have been used around the world to treat COVID patients and have been particularly effective helping older and more at-risk patient populations. In a post-embargo world, United States hospitals and research institutions would have direct access to these drugs and therapies to potentially improve the standard of care for millions of Americans and Clevelanders.

In closing, as our country focuses on its history, especially its history surrounding slavery and race relations, it is worth recalling the direct connection between Cuba and the United States. Cuba was an important stop in the Middle Passage between Africa and America for enslaved Africans. While it is the most regrettable period of our history, we must nevertheless acknowledge this important and historic connection between our two countries.

It is my fervent hope that other municipal and state governments will follow Cleveland's lead to demand an end to the failed embargo. Once the embargo is gone, America and Cuba will be able to build a partnership based in respect, trust, and mutual understanding – a partnership between the proud people of both Cuba and America.

