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An Open Letter to the President of the United States From Young Cuban Americans

June 12, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Since our founding, the CubaOne Foundation has worked to inspire a new generation of Americans to reconnect with their heritage, family, and peers in Cuba. Over 2,000 millennials from across the country and all walks of life have applied to our program, which many have described as “life-changing.” We have seen young Cuban Americans hug their grandparents for the first time, explore their heritage, develop friendships with Cuba’s youth, and return to share these deeply moving experiences with their loved ones and communities here in the United States.

Today we are among the largest Cuban American organizations in the country. While much of our efforts would not be possible without the policy changes that began on December 17, 2014, our work transcends Washington’s politics, administrations, and political parties. We are willing to work with any administration. As the children and grandchildren of political prisoners, Pedro Pan refugees, Bay of Pigs veterans, and people who fled Cuba on the Mariel boatlift, we understand the pain of exile and the importance of human rights.

As a presidential candidate, you said that you would pursue “a better deal” with Cuba. To the majority of Americans and our Cuban American community, a “better deal” means advancing U.S. interests and improving the quality of life of the Cuban people, not returning to Cold War policies. In advance of your upcoming visit to Miami, we respectfully ask that you consider our recommendations which represent the views of the majority of Americans, Cuban Americans, and Cubans on the island:

1. **A PRO-FAMILY POLICY PLACES AMERICA FIRST AND PRIORITIZES HUMAN RIGHTS.** The North Star of your Cuba policy should be advancing U.S. interests and the well-being of the Cuban people. To this end, we encourage you to pursue a pro-family policy of principled engagement. We also strongly support our U.S. diplomats working with their Cuban counterparts to address a variety of issues, including upholding America's longstanding commitment to human rights around the world.
2. **AFFIRM THE RIGHT OF CUBAN AMERICANS TO VISIT AND HELP OUR FAMILIES.** Until 2009, Cuban Americans were only allowed to visit the island once every three years. Returning to similar travel regulations would be counterproductive, cruel, and do nothing to improve human rights. No one should ever have to choose between visiting an ailing relative at their bedside or attending their funeral. We strongly urge you to reject these misguided recommendations that disproportionately penalize Cuban American families.
3. **ENCOURAGE U.S. TRAVELERS TO SUPPORT CUBA'S PRIVATE SECTOR.** Thousands of Americans are visiting Cuba and fueling the fastest growth in its private sector since 1959. Rather than burdening Americans with government regulations that make it harder to visit the island, your Administration should encourage U.S. travelers to stay in Cuban family homes, support privately-owned small businesses, and go beyond the beaten tourist path. We would gladly work with you on developing such an initiative, as this is how we plan our visits to Cuba. Americans are the best ambassadors of our nation's values, and we should want more of our people engaging and supporting broader cross-sections of Cuban society. Kitchen table diplomacy works, and we should encourage it.
4. **ENGAGE THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT TO LOWER FEES ON TRAVELERS TO CUBA.** We hope that your Administration will encourage its Cuban counterparts to ease the hardships posed by high fees on Cuban passports and entry visas, which disproportionately affect lower-income families and young Cuban Americans. Moreover, Cuba has indicated it might unify its dual currency system. Your Administration should support this initiative. Cuba's 10% penalty on exchanging U.S. dollars should also be removed.
5. **MAINTAIN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN HAVANA.** We have read reports that you and Secretary Tillerson have decided to continue our diplomatic mission in Havana. We commend this decision. As the dozens of young Cuban Americans who have visited their loved ones on the island through our program can attest, the U.S. Embassy is vital to American interests and has graciously hosted Cuban Americans, Cuban youth, activists, artists, entrepreneurs, and students.

6. SUPPORT CUBA'S ENTREPRENEURS, YOUTH, AND ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY. Since 2009, Cuba's licensed private sector workforce has grown by over 300 percent, largely due to an infusion of remittances and visitors from the United States. We have been inspired by the Cuban entrepreneurs--particularly the youth--who work hard to offer better lives for their families. As a father and highly successful businessman, we are sure that you can appreciate the important role of entrepreneurs in societies and families and want to support them. To that end, we also encourage your Administration to double-down on ongoing efforts to facilitate the ability of U.S. telecommunication and technology companies to offer their services to the Cuban people.

These recommendations are actionable, would constitute a "better deal" for the United States, and reflect the views and values of the majority of the American people, Cuban Americans, and the 11 million Cubans on the island. We will always welcome an opportunity to discuss with you the importance of US-Cuba policy to our generation, our community, and our country.

Sincerely,

CubaOne Foundation