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August 26, 2010

The Honorable Howard Berman
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
2170 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee
B360 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barney Frank
Chairman
House Financial Services Committee
2129 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Spencer Bachus
Ranking Member
House Financial Services Committee
B371A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Berman, Chairman Frank, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, and Congressman Bachus,

On behalf of the Retail Industry Leaders Association, I write to express our support for H.R. 4645, the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act, which would lift the travel ban and allow U.S. citizens and legal residents to travel to and from Cuba.

By way of background, RILA promotes consumer choice and economic freedom through public policy and industry operational excellence. Our members include the largest and fastest growing companies in the retail industry – retailers, product manufacturers, and service suppliers – which together account for more than \$1.5 trillion in annual sales. RILA members provide millions of jobs and operate more than 100,000 stores, manufacturing facilities and distribution centers domestically and abroad.

For nearly fifty years, the U.S. has maintained trade and travel restrictions on Cuba with a policy of economic isolation. While U.S. sanctions serve to send a strong message of disapproval of the human rights violations in Cuba, they also amount to a forfeit of any opportunity to engage with or positively influence Cuba. By restricting travel and isolating the nation, we lose the opportunity to promote American values in Cuba. Americans that would travel to Cuba, including human rights groups, religious groups, students, business representatives, and tourists, would serve as ambassadors for our way of life and our belief in the value and dignity of each individual.

Furthermore, the travel ban on Cuba is inconsistent with U.S. policy towards other nations that are egregious violators of human rights. This inconsistency in policy is unfair, especially to Cuban Americans seeking to travel to Cuba to visit family and friends.

RILA supports a shift in U.S. policy towards Cuba to lift the travel restrictions with that country. We welcome press reports that the Administration may independently take steps to ease restrictions on travel to Cuba, but Congressional action is necessary to fully eliminate the travel ban. We welcome the June 30 vote in the House Agriculture Committee to approve H.R. 4645, and we urge you to allow a floor vote as soon as possible on the bill to usher in a new era of engagement with and influence on Cuba.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me by phone at (703) 600-2046, or by email at stephanie.lester@rila.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Lester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Stephanie Lester
Vice President, International Trade

cc: The Honorable Collin Peterson
The Honorable Frank Lucas