

Meeting Minutes

Date: Friday, May 16th, 2025
Time: 1:00pm EST
Location: Virtual



Attendees: **Brian Castleberry**, Senior Regional Manager, Office of International Investment and Trade, Maryland Department of Commerce
Michael Lore, Deputy Secretary of State
Delegate Ken Kerr, Maryland House of Delegates
Rebecca Bellinger, Executive Director, Center for Global Business, Smith School at the University of Maryland
Chris Frech, SVP Global Government Affairs, Emergent Bio Solutions
Erin McNeally, Senior Business Consultant
Cassie Folk on behalf of **Laura Merritt**, President at Diageo
Jennifer LaHatte, Managing Director of Policy, Research & Government Affairs, Maryland Department of Commerce
Senator Mark Daly, Senator in Senate of Ireland - 26th Chair of the Senate of Ireland 🇮🇪 Chair of American Irish State Legislators Caucus 🇺🇸 @AmericanIrishSL

Absent: **Delegate April Rose**, Maryland House of Delegates

1. Opening Remarks by **Brian Castleberry**

- Brief history of the Maryland-Ireland Trade Commission from ideation to fruition
 - The concept was spawned by Delegate Kerr's mission to Dublin in August of 2023. Delegate Kerr met with leadership at the Guinness Enterprise Center and other business leaders in Ireland and wanted to form a commission that would help foster trade between Maryland and Ireland.
- Trade delegation trip to Ireland scheduled for June 4-7, 2025
 - The delegation will be led by Harry Coker, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Commerce and former U.S. National Cyber Director.
 - Brian Castleberry and Rebecca Bellinger from the MITC will attend.
 - The trip will support the Maryland Global Gateway Program which helps Irish companies explore or expand into the Maryland market by providing:
 1. Soft-landing space and incubation support.
 2. Connections within Maryland's business ecosystem.
 3. Access to market research, funding pathways, and grant opportunities.

4. Support for long-term growth.
 - The delegation will meet with Platform 94 who has already supported the expansion of two Ireland based companies to Maryland: Brightbeam and PRONAV.
2. **Senator Mark Daly** addressed the group about his vision for the Commission:
 - He sees Maryland as the gateway to the United States and Ireland as the gateway to the European Union.
 - Nearly half of the US states also have Trade Commissions with Ireland.
 - He is traveling to Maryland/DC the week of June 2, 2025 and the MITC members who are not traveling to Ireland that same week will plan on meeting with Senator Daly while he is here.
 - Enterprise Ireland hosts 4 webinars per year for Commissions in the United States. They host the webinars through a group/platform (possibly PwC but need to confirm).
3. Introductions
 - The group held a quick round table session where each Commission member introduced themselves and gave a quick summary of their background.
4. Open Meetings Act Internal Protocols
 - **Michael Lore** led a brief discussion and confirmed a quorum was present.
 - Acknowledged two additional seats for the Commission still needed to be filled with members of the Senate of Maryland. Those are the last seats to be filled, bringing the total member count to 10.
5. Mission & Goals Per Maryland House Bill 1206
 - The group all stated they were clear on the mission and goals of the Commission, and did not need further clarification:
 - The Commission shall study and make recommendations regarding:
 1. Advancing bilateral trade and investment between Maryland and Ireland;
 2. Initiating joint action on policy issues of mutual interest to Maryland and Ireland;
 3. Promoting business and academic exchanges between Maryland and Ireland;
 4. Encouraging mutual economic support between Maryland and Ireland;
 5. Encouraging mutual investment in the infrastructure of Maryland and Ireland;
 6. Other issues as determined by the Commission
 - On or before December 1st, 2025, the Commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.
 - **Michael Lore** also expressed interested in exploring the cultural aspects and synergies between Maryland and Ireland. A few examples were discussed:

- Charles Carroll of Carrollton was a US Senator from Maryland and the only Roman Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress and had deep Irish roots. His family, the O'Carrolls, traced their lineage back to early Irish kings.
- Frederick Douglass was a pivotal figure in the fight against slavery and the struggle for equality in the United States. He rose from being born into slavery on the Eastern Shore of Maryland to becoming a prominent abolitionist, orator, and writer, using his powerful voice to advocate for freedom and justice, and helping to shape the course of the Civil War. Frederick Douglass visited Ireland in 1845, influencing his views on abolition and solidifying his connection with Irish abolitionists and nationalist figures like Daniel O'Connell. His time in Ireland also led to the publication of an Irish edition of his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*

6. Next Steps

- Goal is to have a draft report ready for final review by November 1, 2025.
 - The recommendations can be as detailed or as vague as needed based on where the Commission is with the study.
 - Request for extension of sunset will be referenced in the report.
- Utilize **Senator Mark Daly** to invite special guests as speakers to future MITC meetings.
- Another trip to Ireland is being planned for the American Irish State Legislators Caucus August 20-23, 2025.
 - Each year, the Caucus hosts a Summit in Dublin, Ireland, bringing together legislators from all 50 States. This event provides a unique opportunity to strengthen the educational, trade, and political ties between Ireland and Maryland.
- Once an extension of sunset is approved, the MITC will look at various means of fundraising.
 - Two initial options were discussed:
 1. Raise money through a body affiliated with the Commission; would need to be a 501(c)(3).
 2. **Senator Mark Daly** has also seen other states raise funds through the Commission and then the Department of Commerce holds the funds.
- Immediate Action Items:
 - Schedule meeting with **Senator Mark Daly** the week of June 2, 2025.
 - Schedule next MITC meeting at the Guinness Open Gate Brewery the week of June 16, 2025 or June 23, 2025.

7. The quorum of members elected a Chair and Vice Chair for the Commission:

- Chair, **Delegate Ken Kerr**
- Vice Chair, **Erin McNeally**

8. Closing Remarks

- No further questions or comments from the Commission members.