

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to you as past cochairs of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) and as former partners who worked together on this bipartisan and bicameral organization.

For 23 years, the CECC has monitored and reported on human rights and rule of law in the People's Republic of China. This work has enriched Congress' understanding of developments in China and enabled informed policymaking in Congress and the Executive Branch. It has also been a source for your legislative achievements such as the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which we championed in partnership with you. The CECC also contributed to other human rights legislation enacted under your name, including the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, and the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

To perform its mission, the CECC intrinsically relies on the work of an array of non-governmental organizations who conduct reporting, research and analysis, and convey information from inside China that is not readily available to policymakers in DC. Many of these groups depend on grants from the State Department and USAID to operate.

Your order to freeze foreign assistance funding has been detrimental to the vital work done by our trusted partners working to inform policymakers on human rights and rule of law issues in China. Many have already had to lay off staff, and many will likely go out of business if the funding freeze is not lifted before the 90-day freeze ends.

This would be an immense loss not only to Congress and the Executive Branch, but to the moral cause of human rights of the Chinese people, Tibetans, Uyghurs and other that we have championed with you.

One example is China Labor Watch (CLW) – a key partner for the CECC since its founding –who provides invaluable information about worker rights in China as well as advocacy and relief for whistleblowers who have filed complaints about unfair labor practices. Ninety percent of CLW's budget comes from the U.S. government. Its founder and CEO, Qiang Li, has written that the State Department's funding freeze, in addition to forcing staff layoffs, puts its partners "at risk of harm if they are forced to return to China" and leaves CLW "unable to support workers in forced labor conditions."

There are many China human rights groups supporting CECC's work who are being harmed by the funding freeze but have chosen not to go public as they fear potential retaliation by the Trump Administration. This is the tragic irony. We have long relied on these organizations to convey messages from those inside China too afraid to speak out due to fear of retribution from the Chinese government. Now, these same groups are afraid to speak out inside the United States due to fear of retribution from our own government.

Well before your January 24 order to halt funding, these China human rights groups have been under attack by the Chinese government and Communist Party (CCP) officials. They are subject to cyberattacks, surveillance and intimidation tactics designed to prevent their due participation in UN human rights mechanisms and public

protests, and transnational repression on U.S. soil. Financial support from the U.S. government has given them both tools and the confidence to push back against such acts of aggression from the CCP.

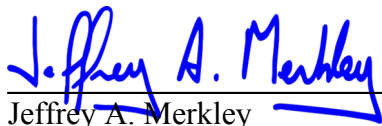
Your decision to halt these State Department grants has added to those risks. The funding freeze not only undercuts our most reliable, dedicated partners in a tangible way – it also sends a signal to Chinese leaders and the world that the United States no longer prioritizes human rights and rule of law in its posture toward China.

In short, your funding freeze is a gift for the CCP.

We ask you, both as Members of Congress who want the United States to continue to be a visible champion of human rights and rule of law in China, and as former partners on the CECC, to take immediate action to end the funding freeze so that organizations working on China human rights can continue to receive support from the U.S. government and the American people.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress