

Maryland seeks Indian sister state, Aruna Miller calls on community

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Thanks to Aruna Miller, the newly elected legislator to the Maryland House of Delegates, (District 15), Governor Martin O'Malley's office has resurrected an idea it had mooted some years ago — to establish a sister state partnership with India.

“The subject of a sister state partnership was an endeavor that began long before I became involved,” Miller told *India Abroad*. “And it was largely the efforts of the Indian-American community leaders and Majority Leader Kumar Barve in collaboration with Maryland's Secretary of State (*John McDonough*) that brought this important matter to the forefront.”

In reactivating this initiative and urging the Indian-American community to push to make it a reality during O'Malley's term, Miller said, “Sister relationships are the only international partnership agreements that link local governments and demonstrates a long-term commitment to building relationships between Maryland and India to improve political, economic, educational and cultural opportunities. It involves people and organized groups at all levels of society in personal, citizen diplo-

macy with the hope that people-to-people interaction, fostered through sister-state affiliations, will improve international relations.”

She said that considering the plethora of high tech and biotech enterprises in Maryland, including several owned and operated by Indian-American entrepreneurs in a state boasts of one of the highest Indian-American populations, such “a sister state partnership will provide a forum for economic development, international trade, and promote cultural understanding through high school, college, and university exchanges, and a variety of cultural and athletic exchanges.”

She noted that currently Maryland's Sister State Program had 10 relationships on five continents.

The original candidate list of Indian states included Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. The final list now comprises Andhra, Gujarat, Maharashtra,



Aruna Miller, left, with Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley

New Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. Punjab and Tamil Nadu — not in the original list — had been included, Miller acknowledged, thanks to some intense lobbying by immigrants from those states.

Miller said the criteria for the final selec-

tion — to be made by end of this month — by of the Office of the Secretary of State in Maryland would include strong community in Maryland, interest in partnerships and a sufficient economic nexus.

“I sponsored Andhra Pradesh, the state where I was born,” Miller said. “While it is a deep honor to be the first Indian-born woman legislator to serve in the Maryland General Assembly, this significant partnership between Maryland and India is a pride that every Indian American should own. Therefore, it is essential that the Indian-American community weigh in on the sister-state election. This is an extraordinary opportunity, and I urge each and every member of the community to contact

Secretary McDonough's office and communicate their preference as soon as possible.”

Miller added: “After the sister state is selected, Governor O'Malley is scheduled to visit India in the fall and move the relationship between the two states forward.”