



## Lithuanian Catholic Youth Group Ateitis

1380 CASTLEWOOD DRIVE, LEMONT, IL 60439

Dear Representative,

This October, a group of Lithuanian-American students and young professionals from all across the U.S. and Canada congregated in Michigan for a weekend retreat to push for the preservation of our cherished culture and homeland. As a group of Lithuanian-Americans that strongly stand for Lithuania's continued independence, we write to you concerning an issue which we believe is of utmost importance to citizens of both Lithuania and the United States.

Over the past several years, Russia escalated tensions in a way that worries Lithuanian-Americans, as seen by their invasions of Georgia and Crimea, and the capturing of an Estonian border guard. More recently, there are reports of Russia deploying Iskander missiles in neighboring Kaliningrad, presenting a large threat to Russia's neighboring countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Given these recent developments, we ask you to reaffirm your support for Article V of NATO, which states that an attack on one nation is an attack on all countries in NATO. Standing by Article V means the preservation of Baltic independence in the face of Russian aggression. After the tragedy of 9/11, Lithuania answered the United States' call to invoke Article V, and supplied troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. We ask that United States support Lithuania in the case of further aggression, just as Lithuania did for the United States. Please, as proud Americans of Lithuanian descent, we ask for you to stand by Lithuania's independence and promise us your written support for Article V.

Lithuania is no stranger to the terrible scourge of occupation. For the last half of the 20th century, Lithuanians struggled to maintain any glimmer of hope as decade after decade of oppression, labor camps, and deportations swept across the proud nation. Lithuanians, famous for their stubborn nature, refused to accept a fate of injustice, and instead fought back against the Soviet machine with uncompromised determination. This fervor, however, did not manifest itself in the form of violence, but instead saw scores of underground freedom-fighters unite to maintain the precious language and traditions of Lithuanians, punishable by imprisonment and near-certain execution. Against all odds, and with the help of Lithuanian Americans and the United States Government, Lithuanians were the first people to successfully declare their independence from the Soviet Union, leading to the cascade of like-minded nations that followed in their footsteps. Although sometimes unpleasant, we must force ourselves to keep this terrible history in our minds if we wish to see the continuation of Lithuania's freedom and autonomy throughout the 21st century.

Sensitive to the struggle of our friends and family during Lithuania's recent occupation, we are concerned for the future of an independent and free Lithuania. As the foremost global superpower, the United States and Congress have the moral duty of protecting the rights of free peoples, both at home and abroad. This includes reaffirmation of support for democratic countries under threat of hostile actors.

Although small in size, Lithuania's love for freedom echoes that of the Founding Fathers of the United States. We have reaped the rewards of a democratic society in the United States, and we ask you to join us in fighting for and protecting Lithuanian freedom and democracy abroad.

Sincerely,

Lithuanian Catholic Youth Group Ateitis