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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
BUSINESS, PROFESSIONS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Senator Angelique Ashby, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 254	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	July 7, 2025
<b>Author:</b>	Gallagher		
<b>Version:</b>	May 23, 2025		
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Sarah Mason		

**Subject:** California-Ireland Trade Commission

**SUMMARY:** Requires the Governor, upon the availability of sufficient nonstate funds, to establish the California-Ireland Trade Commission (Ireland Commission) within the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) as an advisory body to the Governor and the Legislature.

**Existing law:**

- 1) Establishes the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) for the purpose of serving as the lead state entity for economic strategy and marketing of California on issues relating to business development, private sector investment and economic growth. (Government Code (GC) §§ 12096 – 12098.7)
- 2) Authorizes GO-Biz as the lead entity for economic strategy and the marketing of California on issues relating to business development, private sector investment, and economic growth. Authorizes GO-Biz, in this capacity, to coordinate the development of policies and criteria to ensure that federal grants administered or directly expended by state government advance statewide economic goals and objectives. Authorizes GO-Biz to market the business and investment opportunities available in California by working in partnership with local, regional, federal, and other state public and private institutions to encourage business development and investment in the state. Authorizes GO-Biz to support small businesses by providing information about accessing capital, complying with regulations, and supporting state initiatives that support small business. (GC § 12096.3)
- 3) Specifies that GO-Biz is the primary state agency authorized to attract foreign investments, cooperate in international public infrastructure projects, and support California businesses in accessing markets, and requires the Director of GO-Biz to develop an international trade and investment program (ITI Program) attracting employment-producing direct foreign investment to the state and providing support for California businesses in accessing international markets and increasing exports. (GC § 13996.41)
- 4) Authorizes GO-Biz to establish ITI offices outside of the U.S. according to certain requirements. (GC § 13996.42)
- 5) Requires GO-Biz to provide an ITI strategy to the Legislature based on current and emerging market conditions that identifies the process GO-Biz will use for ongoing

evaluation of needs. The strategy, required to be updated once every five years, includes: (GC § 13996.55)

- a) Policy goals, objectives and recommendations necessary to implement a comprehensive international trade and investment program.
- b) Measurable outcomes and timelines for the goals, objectives and actions for the program.
- c) Impediments to achieving goals and objectives.
- d) Key stakeholder partnerships that will be used to implement the strategy.
- e) Options for funding.
- f) An organizational structure for state administration of international trade and investment policies, programs and services.

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires the Governor, upon the availability of sufficient nonstate funds, to establish the California-Ireland Trade Commission (Ireland Commission) within the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) as an advisory body to the Governor and the Legislature.
- 2) Specifies the makeup of the Ireland Commission, how vacancies are filled, that Commission membership priority shall be given to individuals with current or past involvement in organizations that promote Irish affairs or have interest in the well-being of trade relations between California and Ireland, and that Commission members shall serve without compensation.
- 3) States that the purpose of the Commission is to advance bilateral trade and investment between California and Ireland; to initiate joint action on policy issues of mutual interest to California and Ireland; to promote business and academic exchanges between California and Ireland; to encourage mutual economic support between California and Ireland; to encourage mutual investment in the infrastructure of California and Ireland and; to address other issues determined by the Commission.
- 4) Requires the Commission to report its findings, results, and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature within one year of its initial organizational meeting and by February 1 of each succeeding year for the activities of the preceding calendar year. Requires GO-Biz to consider the Commission's recommendations when updating the ITI strategy.
- 5) States findings and declarations that California is home to a vibrant and diverse population, including a substantial number of Irish Americans; California is home to the largest Irish American population in the United States; many Irish immigrants came to California during the Gold Rush. By 1880, one-third of San Francisco's population was of Irish decent; the substantial number of individuals with Irish

ancestry enriches the state's cultural diversity and has helped shape the identity of various regions across the state; there are significant and enduring connections between California and Ireland, and California has historic, economic, and strategic interest in strengthening its ties with Ireland and; recognizing the mutual economic interests of both California and Ireland, and understanding the need to adapt to the evolving global economy, there is a shared commitment to fostering stronger commercial ties between California and Ireland, and establishing a Commission is an important step to encourage investment between the two regions.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** This bill is keyed fiscal by Legislative Counsel. According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, the bill will result in one-time General Fund costs to GO-BIZ of between \$100,000 and \$200,000 to create the Commission and ongoing General Fund costs of about \$285,000 for one staff member in the classification of Trade Investment Specialist at GO-Biz dedicated to the Commission and staff travel and external stakeholder meetings.

#### **COMMENTS:**

1. **Purpose.** The Author is the Sponsor of this bill. According to the Author, "California's connection with Ireland spans centuries, marked by significant Irish immigration during the Gold Rush, contributing to the state's cultural and economic fabric. With over two million Irish Americans, California has the largest Irish American population in the United States. AB 254 will set the foundation for collaboration and growth between California and Ireland, both of which have rich historical, cultural, and economic backgrounds. This important step forward will create an economic partnership that results in more job opportunities for Californians and strengthened global connections."

The Author states "There is significant economic reciprocity between California and Ireland; Ireland is the seventh largest source of direct foreign investment through foreign owned enterprises in California. However, there is a gap in formalizing these relationships to capitalize on mutual economic interests and adapt to global economic dynamics... This bill is critical as it leverages California's significant Irish American heritage and existing global trade position to establish a targeted, structured partnership with Ireland. The commission represents a strategic move to adapt to global economic shifts and cement California's role as a leader in international trade and cultural exchanges; specifically:

- **Economic Potential:** California's status as the fifth largest economy in the world, coupled with its significant export capabilities, underscores the economic potential of fostering stronger trade ties with Ireland. Small businesses, which make up a substantial portion of California's exporters, stand to benefit from increased access to new markets, potentially leading to job creation and economic growth.
- **Global Market Access:** With 95% of the world's consumers living outside of the United States, expanding trade relationships is crucial for California's small businesses to access new markets and expand their reach . Strengthening trade ties with Ireland through the establishment of the

commission can facilitate this access, enabling California businesses to tap into Ireland's open and export-driven economy.

- **Cultural and Political Affinity:** The close cultural affinity and longstanding political, economic, and commercial relations between the United States and Ireland provide a solid foundation for enhanced collaboration. Recognizing and formalizing these ties through the establishment of the California-Ireland Trade Commission strengthens the overall relationship between the two regions and promotes mutual economic support and investment.
- **International Trade Volume:** The outsized U.S.-Ireland commercial relationship, which exceeded \$1 trillion in 2022, highlights the significance of bilateral trade between the two countries. By establishing the commission, California aims to deepen its economic engagement with Ireland and contribute to the continued growth of this significant trade relationship, benefiting both regions economically.

## 2. **Background.**

*GO-Biz.* Currently, GO-Biz administers an International Affairs and Business Development Unit, which serves as California's primary point of contact for expanding international trade and investment relations. This unit focuses on foreign direct investment (services for foreign investors, foreign investment technical assistance, and the EB-5 Investor Visa Program), international trade promotion (STEP program, trade missions, export assistance, and the California-China Trade Office), and international agreements.

GO-Biz currently has authority for undertaking international trade and foreign investment activities. The *International Affairs and Trade Program* report prepared by GO-Biz in 2023 notes that the International Affairs and Trade team (IAT) advises the Governor on international affairs and trade issues, implements strategies to develop and grow partnerships and engagement with foreign partners, and provides recommendations to promote and expand California's trade and foreign direct investment. According to the report, IAT works with a robust network of international partners to promote California exports, support small businesses in accessing global markets, and attract inward investment that brings high-quality jobs to Californians. IAT executed several major international events, including a Clean Energy Trade Mission to Japan with over 100 delegates from California's public and private sectors, a climate-focused gubernatorial visit to China, and a California pavilion at the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit. IAT also successfully implemented trade missions to key markets such as Mexico, China, Japan, and Germany in a variety of strategic sectors, among other efforts and activities.

*Trade.* According to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, industrial goods encompass all non-agricultural goods and include products such as machinery, autos and transportation equipment, information technology products, minerals and metals, petroleum, chemicals, textiles and clothing, leather and footwear, consumer goods, wood products, and fish and fish products. Industrial tariffs are customs

duties on non-agricultural merchandise imports, levied either as a percentage of the value or on a specific basis (e.g., \$1 per 100 pounds).

According to February 2025 information from the Public Policy Institute of California, “In 2024, California’s total merchandise trade reached \$675 billion—close to 16% of state GDP. California imports 2.7 times more goods than it exports, reflecting the purchasing power of the state’s market. However, imports also include intermediate goods used in the manufacturing of California products that could eventually be exported. In this way, tariffs on imported goods may have direct effects on consumers, producers, and exporters in the state.

Manufactured goods dominate California exports at 87% (\$159 billion)—computer equipment, semiconductors, instruments, and aerospace products and parts are at the top of manufacturing exports. The state also leads the nation in agricultural exports (\$15 billion), with products like nuts, processed and fresh fruits, and processed vegetables generating an important revenue stream for California farmers.

*Ireland.* According to the federal Department of Commerce International Trade Administration, “The outsized U.S.-Ireland commercial relationship, which exceeded \$1 trillion in 2022, is significant by international standards and is particularly impressive relative to the country’s population of just over five million people...In 2022, U.S. goods exports to Ireland exceeded \$16 billion and included chemicals and pharmaceuticals, computers and electronic products, aircraft and transportation equipment, power generation technology, medical devices, and electrical equipment. The statistics for services from 2022 record the value of U.S. service exports to Ireland at \$84.3 billion. In 2022, Ireland’s total investment stock in the United States was valued at \$295 billion, maintaining its ranking of the 9th largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the United States. Over 700 Irish firms employ more than 100,000 people across all 50 states...the total stock of U.S. investment in Ireland was \$574 billion in 2022. Almost 1,000 U.S. firms in Ireland currently employ 210,000 people.”

3. **Arguments in Support.** The Chair of the Senate of Ireland notes “With this commission we are eager to continue fostering peace on our island as well as trade, educational, political cooperation, and personal connection...Market of nearly 450 million people and over 1000 companies from around the world already use Ireland as a gateway to the European Union...”

The Consulate General of Ireland notes that “Ireland is the seventh largest investor in California through foreign-owned enterprises, while Californian companies have found in Ireland a gateway to the European market...Ireland is also the sixth largest source of foreign direct investment in the United States as a whole, with the leading ten Irish companies alone employing around 200,000 Americans...”

CRH Americas writes that this bill “would further strengthen the existing ties between California and Ireland and promote economic growth, cultural exchange, and collaborative projects.

**SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION:**

Support:

Chair of the Senate of Ireland  
Consulate General of Ireland  
CRH Americas

Opposition:

None received

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