Testimony Presented to the Appropriations Committee
February 17, 2009

Senator Toni Harp, Co-Chair
Representative John Geragosian, Co-Chair
Members of the Appropriation Committee:

My name is Tim Beeble, and I live in Bethel. I was formerly the Chairman of the Connecticut Historical Commission and I am currently the Chairman of the Historic Preservation Council of the Commission on Culture and Tourism.

Six years ago the General Assembly voted to create what is now known as the Commission on Culture and Tourism by merging the Connecticut Historical Commission, the Arts Commission, the Film Commission and Tourism Commission. Film and Tourism previously had been under the auspices of Department of Economic and Community Development. This thoughtful merger recognized the functional inter relationship of these Commissions and the synergy that could be achieved by linking these four commissions under a single commission. Clearly at that time the legislature believed that tourism and the promotion of the film industry would be better served by a new commission linked to historic preservation and the arts, rather than their continued stewardship under DECD.

The functional and the financial efficiencies of logically combining agencies requires a great investment of time and money. In the case of the Commission on Culture and Tourism, I submit that the re-organization process was iterative and spanned three years. The merger under the Commission on Culture and Tourism is producing the results that the legislature had anticipated. The four functional areas of film, tourism, history and the arts are working together in a coordinated fashion.

When a film producer seeks a site depicting a whaling village, the CCT History Division can assist the Film Division in locating a site. Certainly, tourists are attracted to Connecticut by our heritage and our New England communities that are rich in historic architecture.

Let me draw your attention to one of the federally mandated functions of the History Division, that is the historic environmental review of federally funded projects. Since a majority of federally funded projects in Connecticut are administered by DECD, the proposed merger of CCT and DECD would create a conflict of interest in carrying out such reviews. Given the Economic Stimulus Package that was signed by the President today, Connecticut is poised to received millions of dollars for shovel ready projects, all of which require an objective environmental and historic review. The State can ill afford any delay in accessing these funds due to a merger and loss of historic preservation staff.

Any merger proposal must demonstrate its functional and financial benefits. Folding of history, film, tourism and arts under the Department of Economic and Community Development does not provide functional efficiencies nor savings. Our investment of time and money in the creation of CCT in 2003 is paying dividends to Connecticut. The Commission should be retained.