

**Testimony before the General Assembly Appropriations
Committee**

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By

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Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Ed Dombroskas. I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Regional Tourism District marketing Eastern Connecticut as a travel destination called Mystic Country.

On a number of occasions you have heard that tourism in Connecticut is important.

- 110,000 jobs
- \$70 million in hotel tax revenue to the state.
- \$5.4 Billion generated in Connecticut household income

Important yes - but what I want to talk about today is the importance of state support for tourism promotion and the affects on the citizens of Connecticut.

Clearly the tourism industry recognizes and respects the current economic dilemma. We have already experienced sacrifices with a reduction of regional marketing support by over 70% and elimination of statewide marketing efforts. These reductions do – and will – have an impact.

We all recall the declaration in the movie Field of Dreams “Just build it and they will come.” Maybe so in the movies - but not in real life. Attracting visitors requires a destination to convince potential visitors that our place is where they satisfy their interests and deserves to be where they spend their hard earned money.

So what are the impacts so far on the Connecticut tourism industry? Well – based on earlier decisions the vitality of Connecticut’s tourism industry now depends entirely on the reduced three regional tourism organizations.

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For our part the Eastern Regional Tourism District - Mystic Country - has taken seriously our mission and is working hard to make changes to support and protect the tourism industry in our area. We have:

- Reorganized and reduced our staff to reflect diminished resources
- Established a unique and successful public private partnership with area businesses who contribute over \$250,000 annually to complement state funding.
- Focused on the familiar “Mystic” brand to travelers in the Mid Atlantic and Northeast and will use our resources to cooperatively promote the brand to encourage visitors to choose Connecticut.

Tourism creates jobs and attracts revenue. State support for our region is essential to protect and preserve this vital part of our economy. I am here today to respectfully request level funding for the Eastern Regional Tourism District in the FY 2011 budget.

Let me leave you with one story which highlights the impact tourism has on our economy. Just last week I encountered a constituent in tourism industry. He was concerned about the tourism plans for this year since his business is highly dependent on visitor traffic. He has traditionally relied on the state and regional promotion efforts to support his own promotions. He is concerned since he employs 22 people only 7 of who are seasonal. In addition he engages a vendor who employs 2 full time staff just to service his needs. He is concerned since this year – if Connecticut fails to compete for visitors – he will be forced to lay off his employees and his vendor will likely close her business.

Tourism is a jobs and revenue generating industry.