Tammi Flynn in opposition to the elimination of the tourism districts
HB 6350- ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATING TO REVENUE.***

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Tammi Flynn and I am the Director of Marketing at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme and a board member of the Eastern Regional Tourism District. I am here to testify on the Department of Economic and Community Development budget, in particular to express my opposition to the elimination of the tourism districts.

I have had the pleasure of working with the Eastern Regional Tourism District for the past fourteen years. In that time there have been budget and staff cuts, districts combined, several changes in administration, and more budget and staff cuts. Through all of these obstacles the District continues to produce high quality and innovative marketing initiatives that directly benefit the businesses of our region.

The District is an integral part of the Florence Griswold Museum's marketing plan. Like many local businesses, we rely on the programs of the District to reinforce our own strategies and stretch our marketing dollars. They work their tight budget in creative and resourceful ways for the benefit of all tourism-related businesses, from taking a lead role in partnerships that produce Mystic.org and the Mystic Country Visitors Guide to initiating co-operative advertising in major publications. How could our businesses come together to produce these projects without the resources and leadership of the District? The District helps our businesses succeed. Since 2001 the Museum's attendance has grown 100%. Based on an economic impact study, the average out-of-state Florence Griswold Museum visitor spends an additional $479 while in the area. Thus, on an annual basis, our out-of-state museum visitors contribute $8,622,000 to the local tourism-based economy. I know that our partnership with the Eastern Regional Tourism District is part of our success. Multiply that times all the businesses aided by the District.

While I also respect and rely on the programs provided by the Connecticut Office of Tourism, I truly feel it is important to maintain regional offices. The regional staffs not only know their businesses, but their consumers as well. In this environment of customization, consumers respond to the tailored messages of each district. It's a world of constant communication. Electronic media is all about being quick and responsive and capturing the look and feel of your product. The Eastern Regional Tourism District's savvy social media campaign does just that. District staff are leaders in social media, supplying content for Mystic.org in the form of Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, and a blog. To further encourage visitation, a quarterly consumer e-newsletter highlights seasonal things to do in the region. Travel writers for the major dailies and the hottest bloggers are constantly being fed customized materials from our region. Businesses that tap into these resources have access to thousands of potential

customers at no cost. No cost and minimal time, so that even a small business can increase traffic.

And then there are the guides (in print and electronic formats) the Sundae Drives Ice Cream Trail, an Antiques Trail, the Foodie Finds culinary trail, the Pet-Friendly brochure and a Marine Trail. Once again, these smart marketers saw the trend towards highly specialized promotions and seized the opportunity.

Just thinking about all these projects makes me exhausted, and I didn't get to trade shows, literature distribution, relationship building, or marketing to groups and meeting planners, all while maintaining an office and reporting to a board. I am amazed by what the District accomplishes with two and half staff and two hourly consultants and they do it while enduring the uncertainly of further budget cuts or elimination. Please help them get back to doing what they are so great at – promoting our beautiful state to visitors who will shop in our shops, stay in our inns, enjoy our destinations, and grow our economy.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my opposition to the elimination of the tourism districts.