

LANDMARK COMMUNITY THEATRE INC.

Appropriations Committee Testimony
February 20, 2013

"Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jeffrey Dunn. I am the Executive Director of Landmark Community Theatre at the Historic Thomaston Opera House, recent chairman of the Economic Development Commission for the town of Thomaston and vice chair of the of the Waterbury Region Arts and Culture Collaborative. I have also had the pleasure of serving as a volunteer board member of the Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau. I am here to testify in opposition of house bills 6350 and 6354.

I can easily recite statistics to you like, funding for local tourism is an investment that returns roughly seven dollars for every one dollar invested. Or, the State of Connecticut has a vested interest not only in maintaining local tourism operations but also in funding them in a manner that affords the biggest return on investment. And, the more dollars that are invested in local tourism marketing the bigger the return of Connecticut's struggling economy. All of these statements are true and to the point.

However, They don't tell the whole story. Connecticut is comprised of countless tourism attractions, activities and events that are not only unique to Connecticut but also to the local areas where they are located. In my small town of Thomaston we have the Railroad Museum of New England, the Bradstreet House Museum, The Historic Thomaston Opera House, Phoenix Rising Arts Center, Black Rock State Park, 3 recreational dam areas with the corps of engineers, an annual car show, holiday light up the town celebration and Artzfest to name the most notable. Most people in this room, the state and even in the town of Thomaston would have a hard time listing all of these events.

There is one group of people that wouldn't have a difficult time reciting this list. The hard working employees of the Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau. Jim Whitney, Janet Serra and their staff are constantly promoting Thomaston and all of the towns entrusted to their employ.

It would be easy to dismiss me as simply a supporting board member of the Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau. Which I am. However, there is nothing simple about my support. I observed and utilized the services of the bureau long before I became an active volunteer. I recognized the value of their work and provided my time and talents to their efforts. I believe the Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau provides services that no other agency or group can do effectively. I have witnessed countless examples of there successful efforts throughout our region with numerous organizations. The following are efforts that directly affected my activities.

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The Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau regularly schedules Lodging and Attraction meetings. This is an opportunity for groups to meet and learn about activities in the region and find ways to partner with other groups. These meetings have lead to creating packages for tour groups and individual travelers. We have been educated on state marketing efforts. And, we have been provided with valuable funding opportunities.

The bureau's website and unwind brochure is the main source of information for group tours and leisure travelers. The bureau compiles valuable information about its constituents for publication in these marketing pieces. It is updated regularly. Additional press releases and travel writing is provided on a regular basis to numerous publications. The unwind brochure was the one information piece that accompanied relatives of mine visiting from Sweden last Summer.

The bureau has been instrumental over the years providing crucial information to help market our organizations. They provide surveying services to quantify results of programming and services. This information is used in sales, fundraising and future programming. They have also presented numerous marketing workshops to constituents ranging from partner marketing to e-marketing and social medias.

They provide event support services for road races, outdoor festivals and Civil War reenactments. The bureau helps procure all the necessary equipment and services to make these events successful. They create marketing plans, budgets, site maps, signage and special needs for each event.

The staff attends group tour trade shows and bring back leads and contacts to assist in attracting groups to our attractions and lodging.

On a personal note. The Thomaston Opera House has been a benefactor of the WCCVB services for many years. We have enjoyed numerous group tours attending shows, regional marketing, surveying services and special event support.

I strongly encourage you to oppose bills 6350 and 6354. It is easy to cross out a line item and make the current budget balance. It will be much harder to repair the damage that these dramatic cuts will cause. Tourism marketing requires local efforts. It requires smart, knowledgeable, hardworking people that are willing to take your calls and answer your inquiries. The regional tourism bureaus have experienced deep and constant cuts for the last several years. With each set back, they roll up their collective sleeves and figure out how to continue serving their constituents. I believe funding for the regional tourism bureaus should go back to being funded directly as a percentage of the room tax.

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This is the way it was established many years ago and eventually eliminated. It was a fair and balanced approach to funding. Now, I would be satisfied with simply preserving the current operations.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

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At the Thomston Opera House

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