

ConneCTions
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Appropriations Committee Testimony
February 20, 2013

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Betty Cordellos. I own and operate ConneCTions Receptive Tours, based in Darien, CT but with a statewide focus. ConneCTions designs, packages, markets to, and operates tours for, out-of-state motorcoach companies and tour operators coming into Connecticut; and it offers general and special-interest step-on guide services, provided by on-call independent contractors throughout the state. As a small tourism business owner, I appeal to you to restore the regional tourism districts and regional marketing funding.

More so than other segments of the tourism industry, the fortunes (and survival) of group-reliant businesses like mine rise and fall with those of Connecticut's regional tourism marketing bureaus. With limited funds and even more limited time, I rely on the regional bureaus to understand, represent, and help market my business at national group industry trade shows, nurture long term industry relationships that are critical to new and repeat group tour success, and to provide me with leads that I can act on to book and bring new group tour business into Connecticut. When the districts have funds to attend trade shows, I benefit from new group clients. In lean regional tourism budget years, my bookings suffer.

I've been involved with group tourism in Connecticut for more than 20 years. Although I understand and support a state tourism branding umbrella, the reality is that it falls to the regional districts, like Western Connecticut, to do the heavy lifting in terms of understanding local tourism product and providing appropriate representation and support. Connecticut's appeal lies in its hundreds of small treasures, that elusive 'regional flavor' that is beyond the capacity of a centralized state tourism office to properly address. And not just for my own business.

On more than one occasion, when regional district funds were either in limbo or delayed and district staffs temporarily furloughed as new State budgets were being worked out in Hartford, I fielded phone calls to ConneCTions toll free number from the traveling public for information, suggestions and referrals on places to visit, hotels, things to do. When I'd suggest contacting the state, I would be told they had already tried going that route, found my number and hoped I could help where the state office could not.

Tourism as a revenue generator for the state is directly proportional to the amount of funding allotted to the regional districts. You are familiar with current figures showing that every \$1 you invest in regional tourism generates \$7 for state coffers. You may not have been aware that before regional tourism marketing funding was cut nearly in half in 2010, in parts of Western CT the ROI to the state was as much as \$12 for every \$1 invested.

Regional tourism works for Connecticut. As someone with a vested interest in an adequately funded regional marketing system, I am asking for your support to restore regional tourism district enabling HB 6354 and restore funds to the existing tourism regions (HB 6350). Thank you.