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In Support of Regional Tourism

RE: Public Hearing March 22, 2013 Appropriations Committee

In Support of Regional Tourism Districts

Eliminating Connecticut's three remaining Regional Tourism Districts in favor of one centralized state office is simply out of step with current trends worldwide.

A successful tourism model for Connecticut is one that fosters collaboration between the state's offices of Tourism and Economic Development – who offer the broad stroke - and our three Regional Tourism District Offices who offer 3 decades of relationship building and boots on the ground. The key to a successful tourism and economic development program in CT is one in which the importance of a robust travel and tourism industry is linked to new business opportunities at all levels.

It is not hard to see that tourism is complex, as each region has its own unique flavor. A one size fits all approach strips away that uniqueness. Who is better at understanding the value of a region than those that reside and work there? Wildly popular venues like the Mystic Seaport have much to offer and little to lose with the elimination of the regional tourism districts – but there are literally thousands of other visitor-worthy attractions and lodging venues, restaurants and shops that will suffer.

Personally, we have found the marketing efforts of the Western Connecticut Convention and Visitors Bureau on our behalf priceless. State Offices may be good at many things but drilling down to the local level is not one of them. To centralize the tourism authority is not only short-sighted it undermines the very capacity to celebrate what is special and unique to every corner of Connecticut.

Tourism is a key economic driver for Connecticut and one of the very few areas of the Connecticut budget that generates net revenue for the state. Replacing the Regional Districts with centralized state offices and new personnel that "promise" to work on behalf of local areas is neither cost effective nor sound planning. Our districts have worked for three decades to forge relationships with local, regional, domestic and international partners who promote our business each and every day because of their relationships with our regional district offices. The regional offices are in lockstep with both traditional and current social media outlets. Why reinvent the wheel that is turning our local tourism bus for one that will be missing its spokes???

Sincerely,
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