Robert Bell, President Essex Steam Train and Riverboat

HB 6354
AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Senator Harp, Rep, Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Robert Bell and I am the President of The Essex Steam Train and Riverboat. I am here to testify on the Dept. of Economic and Community Development budget, in particular to express my opposition to the elimination of the tourism districts.

Tourism is vital to the economy of the State. Essex Steam Train and Riverboat has been a partner with the State and region for 42 years and is icon of tourism.

Although we appreciate the excellent efforts that have been put forth the last few years by the State Tourism Office through the DECD, we believe that the Regional Tourism Districts have been instrumental in creating and fostering unique identities in their areas.

Local partnerships have had a strong impact in our area. Essex Steam Train and Riverboat formed such a partnership with The Submarine Force Museum, Ocean Beach Park and The Dinosaur Place called Family Fun Mystic. Combining our efforts, we have been able leverage our meager resources to improve visits, increase room nights with partnership hotels and provide value to the recreating public. (Tax dollars)

Because of the Districts, smaller unique and vital entities like Bed and Breakfasts, museums, shops and restaurants have had a voice and have added character to the district. Being able to work with area town representatives has provided reasons for visitors to experience the flavor and wonder of the regions.

Our visitors are from all parts of the Northeast, USA and worldwide remember and return to Connecticut because of this "special small town warmth".

The District approach set up a number of years ago has created a bond, mutual respect and help each other attitude. That even without money for tourism this bond has kept tourism activities alive.

It would be a mistake to lose this vital hands on local approach.

The cost of maintaining the Districts is very low. These dollars are multiplied many fold through volunteer hours from the District members.

I urge committee members and the legislature restore funds to the Regional Tourism Districts that go a long way to bring tax dollars to the State. Remember for every dollar spent on tourism ten dollars is returned in State revenue and $50.00 plus in income to State business.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about my support for the tourism districts and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.