

Ed Dombroskas

HB 6354

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

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriation Committee, my name is Ed Dombroskas and I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Regional Tourism District known as Mystic Country. From 1991-2006 I served as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Tourism and in addition was the Chairman of the National Council of State Tourism Directors and a member of the US Travel Association Board from 2001- 2004.

I am here today to speak about HB 6354 and in particular about the provision to eliminate funding for the Regional Tourism Districts.

Tourism in eastern Connecticut is largely comprised of many small businesses. Although there are a few larger tourism based destinations and organizations it is those, together with the smaller destinations, hotels, restaurants and services that make the area so attractive to visitors.

Attracting tourism is a competitive endeavor. Connecticut must compete with other states and regions to attract visitors by providing information and education pertaining to our state. It is important that there be a strong statewide tourism effort that reaches out to prospective visitors with a message that will entice and encourage them to choose Connecticut over other choices they may have. It is equally important that there be a strong coordinated regional component that works directly with all of the smaller businesses and attractions on a daily basis. This network of tourism, coordinated through the regional tourism district is able to provide ongoing and relevant information, develop cooperative advertising and marketing opportunities, distribute materials, obtain and maintain current relevant photographic images, speak one on one to prospective consumers and to provide necessary detailed information.

On March 13, 2013 the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) introduced a plan to eliminate the existing regional tourism districts and their community/industry based Boards and replace them with a DECD controlled system of disbursed "agents" and annual grants. These grants would be awarded by DECD with input from a DECD selected advisory group. The DECD proposed system is unlike any other regional tourism promotion organization I am familiar with based on my experience at the national level.

In eastern Connecticut we have formed public private partnerships such as with the Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau, the Chambers of Commerce, business organizations like the Putnam Business Association and others to achieve results that could not otherwise have been realized. In Northeast Connecticut we have developed close ongoing dialog that has resulted in projects to assist the area like a yearlong photography project collecting professional images throughout an entire year. Overall we have been able to cooperatively develop a single print publication "Mystic Country Visitors Guide" that avoids duplicative advertising publications and provides an awarded winning fulfillment piece to visitors without cost to the partners or consumers.

Regional tourism efforts are essential to the success of Connecticut's tourism economy. We have shown over the last few economically challenging years that our District, by working with our partners, can achieve cost effective tourism advertising, public relations and promotion that benefits our businesses and our state.