

Linda Auger
Vice-President and Co-Owner of Taylor Brooke Winery

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

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Linda Auger and I am the Vice-President and Co-Owner of Taylor Brooke Winery in Woodstock; located in the Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD) better known as Mystic Country. 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.

When I read that the Governor had recommended that the State Tourism account be returned to \$15 million dollars, I was thrilled. Well, maybe that's an exaggeration, since I believe more money should be allocated to tourism, but given the budget shortfall, I am satisfied with that amount. However, the elimination of funding and the statutory authorization for Regional Tourism is just unacceptable in my mind.

The ERTD represents all businesses, attractions, destinations and entities in Eastern Connecticut that identify themselves as involved in the tourism industry; a major contributor to the State's economy. The ERTD also works with the Chambers of Commerce within the region and private tourism based organizations (the type of partnership I believe the Governor supports), such as The Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau (GMVB), New London Main Street and the Putnam Business Association, to cooperatively develop a consistent consumer focused message encouraging individuals, groups and meetings to visit our area.

From seashore to scenic rolling hills, we have a rich cultural heritage. We offer such diversity as Mystic Seaport, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun Casinos, as well as such natural attractions of The Last Green Valley like kayaking the Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers and driving along National Scenic Byway Route 169.

When the State decided many years ago to reduce the number of Regional Districts from eleven to five, many of us in the "Quiet Corner" in particular, were devastated to learn we would be losing our office. We were afraid of losing our identity within the newly formed Mystic Country and in fact, that was the case in the beginning. However, that changed with the formation of a NE Committee that meets monthly with the Executive Director of Mystic Country and other staff; our ideas and concerns have been listened to and acted upon when possible. Through hard work and perseverance, our committee has developed a very good working relationship with the staff at Mystic Country resulting in such popular products as the "Sundae Drive Ice Cream Trail Brochure", "Antiques Trail Brochure" and most recently the "Foodies Brochure".

Tourism has always been an important part of the economy in eastern Connecticut and the Tourism District has, over the past 31 years, worked to support and promote all of the businesses, attractions and features in the area. My fear is that if we eliminate the Regional offices, we will experience a decline in tourism, which will result in a decline in revenue to businesses and the State. We will lose our momentum. The "Quiet Corner" will be forgotten. Those relationships that took so long to develop will disappear. **The health of all tourism businesses and the dollars generated for the state economy depends on the promotion of the region.**

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.

Respectfully submitted,
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