March 2, 2015

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I thank you for your past support of regional tourism, and I request continued funding for the three regional agencies that are the creation of the legislature (CGS 10-397). Regional tourism has for many years been a partner with the state central tourism agency in generating the revenues and jobs associated with tourism in the state. The regional agencies have provided a local and diverse complement to the more overarching and general efforts of the central office. That partnership and its shared responsibilities should be maintained for the good of the whole state and its individual towns and various regions. As a professional nature center administrator in Connecticut for 30 years, first in Sharon and now in Bristol, I have seen first-hand how regional tourism efforts have positively affected the destinations I was in charge of and the communities in which they were in. It is the attention to localities that make regional tourism agencies so effective.

Currently the budget before you includes funding for state agency tourism marketing at $10 million, but totally eliminates funding for the three regional agencies. This is a shortsighted and potentially harmful approach for the reasons listed below, and I urge you to consider reinstating the very productive entities that have been directly responsive to the needs of your local and regional constituencies. Please find the $1.5 million needed to sustain the three regional tourism agencies.

Sincerely,

Scott E. Heth
Executive Director
Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, Bristol

Please support regional tourism agencies because they:

- Generate significant revenue and support numerous jobs.
- Have been established by the Connecticut State Legislature to promote tourism in the state and to represent the regions, and have evolved over 30 years
- Provide every Connecticut town a direct voice in decisions regarding marketing tourism in their community and in their region.
- Provide a corps of knowledgeable volunteers dedicated to marketing regional tourism in cooperation and partnership with the Office of Tourism's overall brand campaign
- Offer a vehicle for tourism industry representatives to participate in decisions that directly affect their business and cultural heritage.
- Generate financial investment and involvement by private entities in tourism marketing activities.
- Provide input and services to the State Office of Tourism.
- Support and augment the efforts of the State Office of Tourism as partners in Connecticut tourism
- Focus regional public and private sector marketing efforts through shared objectives and strategies with the State Office of Tourism presenting an integrated campaign that showcases each of the five regional brands represented by the Central, Eastern and Western Regions that tell the story of Connecticut.
- Generate millions of dollars of free media exposure for the regions.