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**Testimony of Farouk Rajab, President of the Connecticut Lodging Association
in support of Regional Tourism District Funding and CT Tourism Marketing Funding to the
Appropriations Committee - March 2, 2015**

Dear Senator Bye and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Connecticut Lodging Association strongly supports continued funding of state tourism marketing.

Tourism is an essential economic driver for the well-being of Connecticut. The industry has suffered greatly as result of the recession and the absence of tourism marketing on the regional and national level for almost 3 years. Launched in May 2012, the State's marketing efforts need additional time and resources to have a significant impact on potential travelers. The key to marketing success is repetition of the message. Consumers, who are still conservative with regard to discretionary spending, are being inundated with tourism advertisements from across the country and the world. Without continued significant investment in tourism marketing, Connecticut will, once again, fall off the map.

With a 15% occupancy tax, the lodging industry financially supports many of the State's programs beyond tourism marketing. In FY 2013-14, the occupancy tax generated more than \$105 million for the State's coffers. We believe that continued marketing would significantly increase that contribution.

- Travel and tourism activities account for over \$11.5 billion in Connecticut economic activity each year.
- As of December 2014, Connecticut's Leisure and Hospitality Sector accounted for 157,000 jobs, an increase of 11,508 jobs in 2013.
- Quality of life in Connecticut is rated among the best in the United States. Our cultural, historic and entertainment opportunities attract people and businesses to live and work in the state. Preserving our quality of life through our investment in culture and tourism is a key to rebuilding our economic future.
- Numerous state, regional and national studies show continued funding is essential to sustain the culture and tourism economy. Every dollar invested returns 7 times in direct tax revenue
- The Regional Tourism Districts are essential to promoting small businesses within the tourism industry.

Continued marketing is the only way Connecticut will be competitive in an industry where there is intense competition. We urge you to continue funding for the \$12 million investment in State Tourism Marketing so we can maximize the economic impact of travel and tourism in Connecticut.

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