Testimony of Robert Winchester, President and COO of Waterford Hotel Group, Inc., in support of Regional Tourism District Funding and DECD/Tourism Statewide Marketing Funding to the Appropriations Committee - February 10, 2016

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

Waterford Hotel Group strongly supports continued funding of statewide tourism marketing. Hotel sales tax receipts increased by $11 million, year over year. This industry funds its own marketing. In fact, one out of every 18.8 jobs in Connecticut is now supported by tourism.

The industry has suffered greatly after the recession due to the limiting of tourism marketing regionally and statewide. The State's marketing efforts launched in May 2012 at marketing funding of $15 million, which has declined to the present level, need additional time and resources to have a significant continued 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 2014-15, occupancy tax generated more than $116 million for the State's coffers, and in FY 2013-14 generated over $105 million. Continued marketing would significantly increase that contribution year over year. Tourism is an essential economic driver and revenue stream, for the well-being of Connecticut.

- 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.

- 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

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 **$9.5 million investment in State Tourism Marketing** so we can continue to maximize the economic impact of travel and tourism in Connecticut.

Robert Winchester
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