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General Manager
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REFERENCE SUPPORT OF BILL # 5576 DEDICATED SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR TOURISM FROM THE HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX

Thank you for hearing my testimony in support of this important bill.

My name is John Lombardo, and I am the General Manager of Saybrook Point Inn and Spa.

Involvement in Tourism has been a major focus of my career since graduating from the Cornell University Hotel School in 1977. I've had the pleasure of working in resorts and hotels from Maui to Walt Disney World, the Virgin Islands, and the Dutch Caribbean. During this journey I also served on many restaurant associations and tourism bureaus including the Kansas City Convention and Visitors Bureau where we instituted a 1% fee on hotel rooms in the 80's to finance the expansion of Bartle Hall Convention Center to spur economic growth.

The message I would like to communicate to you today is that I have witnessed first-hand how the success of vibrant tourism affects Jobs, Tax Generation, and Quality of Life for Families.

A mentor early in my career said something to me that has stuck ever since, "There is Nothing Worth Less Than Last Night's Empty Hotel Room or Ballroom". You can't sell two of the same tomorrow, once its gone, it's gone.

With these lost opportunities comes less wages for the large segment of variable payroll cost consisting of busboys, servers, room attendants, valet parkers, front desk clerks and so on. Gone is also the employee and matching funding for social security and other taxes. Workers compensation, and disability insurance are funded less, so the reliance on state shortfall programs and other social service and subsidy components is increased. So instead of a "Double-Dip" it's a "Double-Clip", not only is the income for such taxes and programs lost, but an increase in state expenses kicks in.

Whether the job income lost if for full-time or part-time employees, either way it has a dramatic effect on their family's ability to either meet their basic living expenses, or be able to afford a new crib for a newborn vs. accepting a hand-me-down from friends or family.

There are many statistics and reports outlining how Tourism affects spending in other segments of the economy; but studies I have reviewed are at a minimum a 3-time multiplier and as much as 6 to 9 times; for every dollar spent on tourism, that much is spent in other areas to generate and sustain jobs, tax income and less reliance on state-funded social services programs, and a better quality of life for families.

I have heard the view expressed that people will "come anyway". Spending money on ad campaigns, travel/trade shows, effective web sites and social media including all the management time involved in producing the right messages to the right audience, is not necessary. That is a very dangerous assumption and that will create a bigger and more expensive hole to crawl out of when it is realized. This is particularly true in today's digital world and public relations world, which support print and other traditional media.

So in closing, I urge you to consider the effect that tourism has on driving the economy, funding taxes, and keeping CT citizens employed so they can share the fruits of their labor with their families.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Lombardo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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