Commerce Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7306
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE’S BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON TOURISM.
Vote Date: 3/19/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/12/2019
File No.: 355

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Commerce Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
The Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism was formed to provide insights and perspective of the state with regard to the arts culture and tourism and offer policy recommendations to maximize tax revenue for the state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism: In support of this bill the Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism submitted a briefing with recommendations for investment and efficiency. The Panel endorses the Arts, Culture and Tourism (ACT) policy recommendations of a three prong system.

1.) Smart Reinvestment Strategy – Reinvest 25% of Lodging Tax revenue into the tourism fund which consists of 40% for arts & culture and 60% for tourism. The recommendation was not to increase the Lodging Tax itself.

2.) Optimal Collaborative Efficiency
   A.) Appoint a commissioner to re-establish the former Culture and tourism Commission who will directly report to the Governor. The panel testified that the State would benefit from focused leadership and vision stating that business and dynamics of
the arts, culture and tourism are unique and interdependent while being seen as one industry.

B.) Form a council of experts representing relevant industries and constituencies. The Council would coordinate with the Office of Tourism and other state agencies such as DOT, DEEP and DECD. The Council would be modeled after the former Tourism Council in terms of Representation and authority.

3.) Tourism Marketing Reinvestment Priorities
   The panel testified that a true plan of strategy would capture the public’s perspective with not only a statewide campaign but also specialize to unique regions, audiences, products and experiences. This would be done in several ways.
   A. Across the U.S. and internationally statewide marketing alone is not as effective or efficient as those supported by regional organizations. The Panel testified the importance to increase from three to five regional destination marketing organizations of Litchfield Hills, Coastal Fairfield, Greater New Haven, River Valley/Greater Hartford and Mystic Country.
   B. Fund a statewide Convention & Sports Bureau (CSB)
   C. Open Welcome Centers
   D. Review marketing strategy, branding and slogan
   E. Create a five year strategic tourism plan
   F. Ease DOT restrictions on highway signage

See Report for full briefing materials.

**Donald A. DeVivo, DATTCO:** He testified that as chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Tourism he and the panel listened to seasoned experts across the state who shared many ideas on helping Connecticut compete with other states in New England. He endorses the briefing submitted by the Blue Ribbon commission on Tourism.

**Ed Dombroska:** Mr. Dombroska testified as the former Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Tourism (1991–2006), Chairman of the National council of Tourism Directors (2005-2007) and as a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission on tourism. He stated that tourism in Connecticut has been a great contributor of our economy but that recent numbers show our tourism economy is declining. He believes the state has communicated to visitors that we not interested in welcoming guests or businesses. Mr. Dombroska referred in his testimony to the Legislature taking actions to maintain regional tourism in the last three budgets that were derailed. He testified that even today the 1.2 million dollars appropriated and available in FY’19 to support regional tourism has been withheld due to inaction.

**Helen Higgins:** She testified that she has over 35 years of experience with tourism in our state as a former leader of CT Humanities, the CT trust for Historic Preservations and the CT league of History Organizations. Ms. Higgins served on the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Tourism and states that she supports the bill.

**Ginny Kozolwski, Executive Director, Connecticut Lodging Association:** She testified that The Connecticut Lodging Association supports funding of statewide marketing and allocating 60% as opposed to the current 32% to tourism marketing. The Connecticut Lodging Association states they are opposed to any lodging tax increases.
**Larry McHugh, President, Middlesex Chamber:** He testified that as a member of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism the Panel helps a series of meetings across the State to solicit ideas and solutions from a broad spectrum of tourism experts, marketing professionals and industry leaders. The consistent message is there is a need for additional investment in tourism in the State of Connecticut. He supports the points made in the report from the Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism. He agrees with the report and highlighted that the state reinvest 25% from the Lodging Tax into the Tourism Fund, fund the Connecticut Convention & Sports Bureau, fund five regional Destination Marketing Organizations and reopen Welcome Centers on Connecticut’s highways.

**Jeff Shaw, Senior Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, The Alliance:** He testified in support of the bill noting tourism and the arts and culture industry are important economic drivers for our State. Mr. Shaw noted that Arts, Culture and Tourism operate in separate offices within DECD and that the State would benefit from a unified vision for Arts, Culture and Tourism with shared goals and collaboration. He stated the Alliance supports the finding of the Blue Ribbon Panel to increase allocation of lodging tax to 25% and dedicate 60% to tourism and 40% to arts and cultural programs. He adds that with the DECD budget, a change to the name “Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund” would clarify the funds intended purpose. The Alliance ask for consideration of the DECD to change the line item in the budget from “Tourism Fund” to “Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund” as a representation for how the funds are used.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by:** Gaia McDermott  
**Date:** 4/1/19