
Zaire E. Lambright

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Sent: Wednesday, May 19, 2021 11:08 AM
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Subject: Written Testimony for the House Oversight Committee on Tourism
May 19, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Tourism Oversight in Rhode Island Representative Lauren Carson, Chair

Members of the Committee, I am submitting written testimony to your meeting of May 16, 2021. My apologies for missing the phone call from your efficient House staff. I was not able to sign on to the meeting and my phone silenced the incoming call due to it being an unfamiliar number. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony.

At the risk of being redundant to what my colleagues in tourism may have testified at the meeting, I would like to respectfully offer these thoughts. Since Rhode Island House of Representatives Floor Amendment 8422 Substitute A, An Act Relating to Rhode Island Tourism and Development was passed in 1986, the tourism industry in Rhode Island has grown exponentially state-wide. This Act was the first attempt at insuring that the growth of tourism would be supported financially by a lodging tax, and offered the equal opportunity to develop tourism in all of our 39 cities and towns.

The passage of this Act allowed our agency, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, a 501(c)3 organization, to move from a volunteer group to a professional organization over the next 35 years and serve our 9 Northern Rhode Island communities. Through the years, the Act has been changed several times. Some times the changes were not in the best interest of all of our communities. It is vital that the management of tourism's growth be readdressed since our state is taking a long thoughtful view on climate change.

I would like to suggest that the House Committee on Tourism Oversight deputize the tourism district managers and the state office of tourism to take an updated approach to financing and developing equitable tourism in our state. There certainly are opportunities to realign the existing tax structure addressed in the ACT and balance revenues and tourism development for an improved outcome. If empowered with the responsibility, a January 1, 2022 report could be delivered for your committee's review.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Robert D. Billington, Ed.D. President Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Inc.