



**Testimony of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
In Support of Shifting Tourism-Related Funding to Rhode Island Commerce
For New Arts, Events, and Tourism Development Projects**

Chairperson and Honorable Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the strategic alignment of tourism-related funding within the State of Rhode Island. We respectfully urge your support for shifting designated tourism development funding to Rhode Island Commerce for the purpose of advancing new arts, events, and tourism development projects statewide.

The Blackstone Valley is widely recognized as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution and remains one of Rhode Island's most distinctive cultural and historical regions. Tourism in our region—and across the state—is no longer driven solely by passive visitation, but by experiential travel: festivals, arts programming, cultural events, outdoor recreation, and community-based experiences that invite visitors to stay longer and spend more locally.

Rhode Island Commerce is uniquely positioned to steward this next generation of tourism investment. As the state's lead economic development agency, Commerce brings the infrastructure, analytical capacity, and cross-sector partnerships necessary to ensure that tourism dollars are deployed strategically, equitably, and with measurable economic returns. Locating arts, events, and tourism development funding within Commerce will better align tourism promotion with small business growth, workforce development, placemaking, and downtown revitalization efforts.

A shift in funding would allow Rhode Island to:

Support innovative, high-impact events and arts initiatives that attract year-round visitation rather than seasonal peaks alone. An example of this would be the award-winning Trolls created by artist Thomas Dambo across Rhode Island. This state-wide art project has welcomed enormous visitation to each location in RI and has garnered an incredible amount of positive press. This project would not have happened if not for the available funding via RI Commerce.

Strengthen regional destinations like the Blackstone Valley by investing in signature experiences that leverage local history, food & culture, and creative talent. With the support of RI Commerce, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council was able to create the "Blackstone Valley International Food Trail" which highlights the wide variety of authentic cultural dining options around the region. This focused program has generated hundreds of thousands of webpage visits, driving visitors to local, family-owned businesses.



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Encourage public-private partnerships that multiply the impact of state dollars and reduce reliance on one-time or short-term funding sources.

Ensure accountability and outcomes, using Commerce's existing performance metrics to track visitor spending, job creation, and community benefit.

For the Blackstone Valley specifically, access to Commerce-led tourism development resources would accelerate projects that activate mill villages, expand cultural programming along the Blackstone River, and support locally produced festivals, markets, and heritage events. These initiatives not only draw visitors, but also improve quality of life for residents and strengthen community identity.

Tourism is an economic engine, but it is also a storytelling tool. By investing in arts and events through Rhode Island Commerce, the state can tell a more complete, compelling story—one that highlights Rhode Island's creativity, diversity, and regional character while delivering tangible economic benefits.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council supports this funding shift and believes it represents a forward-looking approach to tourism development—one that is collaborative, data-driven, and rooted in community impact.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Rhode Island's economic and cultural vitality.

Respectfully submitted,

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Blackstone Valley Tourism Council

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