

May 27, 2015

Testimony for House Finance Committee
In support of 2015 H-5914

AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT-
TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Testimony from Robert Billington, President
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council

Members of the House Finance Committee

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council endorses H-5914 that supports a Rhode Island Tourism Development program with the predictable funding.

We feel the legislation maintains the integrity of Rhode Island's regional tourism development work, as it recognizes the coordination that takes place everyday and "dovetails" it with a statewide marketing effort. It also provides a brief outline of a tourism development plan.

The only concern we have is where the \$4 million would come from. To that end we suggest that the \$4 million come from the 21% in lodging taxes that is now being sent to the General Fund. The 21%, is about \$3.5M, and was shifted to the General Fund in 2001.

We ask that the Committee consider expanding the Lodging Tax to all over-night accommodations throughout our state. On-line hotel sellers, shared-economy stays, vacation home rentals, campgrounds and many Bed and Breakfasts have an un-fair advantage over our hotels that are required to collect the lodging tax. This "leveling of the playing field" would supply ample additional funding for ongoing tourism development for Rhode Island.
