

Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau
Testimony for the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee
By John Oliver, President/CEO Visit Erie
and Immediate Past Chair of the Board of PACVB

Good morning Chairman Stern, Chairman Kirkland and members of the House Tourism Committee.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the creation of a Pennsylvania Tourism Commission. I am John Oliver the President/CEO of VisitErie, and the immediate Past Chair of the Board of the Pennsylvania Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau (PACVB) and the current Chair of its Government Affairs committee. Joining me at the table is Rob Fulton, the President/CEO of PACVB and Craig Davis, the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for VisitPittsburgh. Craig also chaired our task force on the development of a public – private tourism partnership. The PACVB represents the 50 different destination marketing agencies (DMO's) in the Commonwealth. These organizations are the lead tourism promotion and marketing agency for every county and region of the Commonwealth.

Our organization understands and appreciates the tough challenges that you face today trying to balance a state budget in the face of declining revenues and increasing program needs, while working to create new jobs and retain existing jobs.

It is our feeling that these challenges now provide an opportunity to make a transformational change in how our Commonwealth promotes and supports tourism.

Tourism is an industry that has been called the second largest in Pennsylvania. It is an industry that provides in excess of \$3 billion in taxes to the State and supports over 400,000 jobs which are found in every county of the Commonwealth. The proposed legislation to create a Pennsylvania Tourism Commission can be that transformational change.

This legislation would reduce the size of government and create a more efficient public-private tourism partnership by moving the state Tourism office outside the Department of Community and Economic Development as it currently exists. The formation of this public-private partnership places a large responsibility on the industry to support its efforts in partnership with State Government. A charge that I believe will be overwhelmingly accepted by all aspects of the hospitality industry. This Commission would be recognized as the State's official tourism marketing agency with the

responsibility to promote the entire tourism experience in Pennsylvania to potential visitors.

The Commission would ensure a greater alignment across the tourism industry to capitalize on increased economic opportunities relating to tourism in Pennsylvania. The creation of a very representative Board to set policy and direction for the organization will allow the Commission to be able to react to market conditions more expeditiously than currently exists. Having all of the internationally recognized segments of visitor spending represented on the Board will also allow our industry to accurately direct and maximize the advertising and promotional efforts undertaken by the Commission. At the same time having representatives from the public sector of government, such as this Committee and the Senate Tourism Committee providing advice and counsel will solidify this as a true public-private endeavor.

We recognize that the issue of funding this Commission in the long term will need to be addressed. PACVB has for the past 18 months has had a task force involved in addressing this issue. This task force along with participation with several industry associations and staff from this committee, the Senate Tourism committee and DCED has conducted research of how state wide tourism promotion has been conducted and funded across the United States. The most successful programs have all included a

combination of dedicated funding, a general fund appropriation and contributions from the private sector. It is our recommendation that the newly formed Pennsylvania Tourism Commission be tasked with using the research already done to develop a long term funding plan. In the short term, we would request that at a minimum the current level of funding for tourism marketing being received by DCED be appropriated to the Tourism Commission. We do feel that the state needs to make a significant investment in tourism promotion. Pennsylvania has fallen from a top 5 position in state tourism promotion to 44th. It is our belief that with the various sectors of the private industry at the table additional co-op marketing dollars will be raised to compliment the general appropriation from the State.

PACVB would like to recognize the leadership of Chairman Stern who has not only asked the tourism industry how he and this committee can assist our industry but has listened and is acting. We also would like to thank Al Taylor for his invaluable institutional knowledge, advice and ability to take the ideas of the tourism industry and put them into the legislation that would form this tourism commission.

Over 50 years ago the General Assembly and the Governor crafted legislation that placed Pennsylvania as one of the leading States in tourism promotion. We feel that

this transformational legislation will allow Pennsylvania to again become one of the leaders in statewide tourism promotion.

Thank you and I, Rob or Craig would welcome any questions you might have for us.