

**PA House Tourism & Recreational Development Committee
Public hearing on proposed independent PA Tourism Commission
Ramada Inn, State College, PA
September 21, 2011**

Testimony on behalf of HeritagePA

Good Morning. I am here on behalf of HeritagePA to express support for a proposed independent PA Tourism Commission. We support legislation that strengthens PA's tourism industry and best promotes our state's key assets, especially our heritage and outdoor recreation opportunities. The proposed PA tourism commission holds great promise for accomplishing that goal. The Pennsylvania Travel and Tourism Partnership had the opportunity to hear about similar efforts across the nation and reached consensus on the need for our Commonwealth to act regarding the future of its tourism industry, of which HeritagePA is an active partner.

HeritagePA is a statewide non-profit association of Pennsylvania's twelve state and nationally designated Heritage Areas and Corridors. These areas are the result of strategic planning grounded in public participation and have developed tremendous tourism product for over two decades.

All twelve Pennsylvania Heritage Areas share fundamental philosophies and goals including:

- To strategically plan for and invest in the Commonwealth's tourism industry
- To conserve historic and cultural resources
- To conserve and enhance the development of natural and recreational resources
- To develop educational and interpretive resources
- To help stimulate heritage tourism and economic development
- To establish partnerships to help steward the advancement of PA communities

Through HeritagePA we continue to advance our work in partnership with our elected officials, state agencies, tourism professionals, and grassroots organizations to protect and enhance our unique product – the natural beauty and cultural identity that increasingly draw visitors and investment and frame our daily experience.

Heritage is a fast-growing and hugely important segment of the tourism industry. A 2002 study showed that nearly 93 million Americans included at least one cultural arts, heritage, or historic activity or event while traveling. An area's heritage resources reflect the distinctiveness of the people and events important to the lifestyle and history of a community. Heritage resources help keep tourism development authentic and connect visitors to the life of a community. Because of this, it is important to protect and manage these resources.

Pennsylvania is the leading state in this country's heritage development movement. In fact, Maryland and Utah have modeled their own programs after the PA Heritage Areas Program. In 2000, delegates from Utah's Governor's Office visited Pennsylvania to learn more about the heritage park system. "Utah is just beginning to realize the potential of heritage tourism and the opportunities it can provide for the rural areas of our state," said Wes Curtis, director of the Governor's Rural Partnership, State of Utah. "Rather than develop this potential from scratch, we decided to look to the state that seems to be doing these things better than anyone else -- Pennsylvania. Through our investigations and research on who's doing what and how it's being done, we have concluded that the Pennsylvania approach seems to make the most sense."

HeritagePA acknowledges the good work of its friends and partners in the CVB/TPA/DMO community. They have done, and continue to do, an excellent job promoting and marketing Pennsylvania. We also applaud the work and vision of this committee and PACVB - moving that effort forward with a strategic plan that has strong roots in private sector partnerships. Pennsylvania's heritage areas were built on that premise. I am here today on behalf of my colleagues pledging that HeritagePA stands ready to support the work ahead – finalization and passage of legislation that will sustain and strengthen the economic impact of tourism on communities throughout the Commonwealth as well as heritage areas continued efforts to conserve and improve the strong cultural, historic, and recreational assets that make Pennsylvania a “must see” destination.

Thank you for your time.