

PA Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau

Testimony for the Tourism and Recreational Development Committee

By Chris Barrett, President & CEO, PA Dutch CVB
and President & CEO, Lancaster Science Factory

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

I want to first thank you for providing me this opportunity to testify today concerning a subject of great importance to our industry. I'm Chris Barrett, President & CEO of the PA Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau. The PA Dutch CVB represents over 700 hospitality interests within Lancaster County. Our membership is very diverse in that it is comprised of one room bed & breakfasts, 300 room four diamond hotels, world class amusement parks, and fine dining or traditional PA Dutch cooking establishments just to name a few. Our membership employed 21,000 individuals in 2010. On average, over 11.3 million guests spend \$1.6 billion in Lancaster County yearly which translates into over \$300 million in tax impact.

We find ourselves in difficult times. All of you have the inevitable task of wading through a morass of information and deciding which interests are to be funded under an extremely stressful fiscal climate. This climate demands us to all think differently and to be creative. To be entrepreneurial in our approach is essential.

When Governor Corbett shined a light on the possibility of forming public, private partnerships in an effort to shrink government I was ecstatic to say the least. Having spent over 18 years in the private sector with Hershey Entertainment and Resort Company I became accustomed to creativity and entrepreneurial thinking as a matter of course. Having now spent the last seven years in the public sector, I can see the merits of combining both. The public sector has the power to convene interests while the private sector has the power to execute the product of both. By product I mean the collaboration of both in planning and creating a common roadmap to achieve an aggressive goal.

Before presenting my view of the proposed House Bill 2056 put forth by you Mr. Chairman, I would like to take a moment to reflect on where we have been.

For the last 25 years, millions of dollars have been spent branding the product that we know as Pennsylvania...the fourth most driven to state in the country. A portion of this investment was often to "rebrand" with the change of administrations. Brand refreshments are merited from time to time to breathe new life into a brand that may have gotten stale or has just plain changed. However, to simply stamp a new image for the sake of doing so on something is extremely costly.

The private sector is concerned with a return on investment and decides how much to spend marketing a product according to ROI considerations. The public sector has different measures that just aren't compatible. For example, regional marketing proposed by the last administration should have made sense. It didn't for most of our

destinations. We gave it our best effort in trying to make it work. Even when it didn't the administration continued to insist that it did and designed programs to that end which in my opinion were incredibly wasteful of scant resources. However, no countermeasures were in place to keep the administration in check and grounded in the decision making process of how and where to spend dollars marketing Pennsylvania. I would assert that this distracted our industry and ultimately hurt the overall tourism marketing effort. This could have cost jobs.

Mr. Chairman House Bill 2056 is just what the doctor ordered. It helps to eliminate inconsistency in administration turnover, helps to maintain brand consistency and more importantly, includes our most important resource, private sector partners in the decision making process. If we were to align all of the disparate tourism/hospitality interests in deciding how, when and where our tourism marketing dollars are spent...we would be a force to be reckoned with.

My biggest fear is the unknown. The brand Pennsylvania in the mind of the consumer is eroding slowly but surely. The marketing game is all about consumer top of mind awareness. Every day that we don't establish this partnership we are losing ground to competitive destinations that are spending millions on television in our feeder markets... like Florida or Michigan for example.

All of us are passionate about our industry and its potential for the future. House Bill 2056 is the next logical step in our evolution to becoming a world class destination.

Thank you for your time.

