

Testimony for the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee

By Rob Howell

General Manager, The Shawnee Inn and Golf Resort and PTLA, Board Member

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the creation of the Pennsylvania Tourism Commission. I am Rob Howell, General Manager of The Shawnee Inn and Golf Resort in the Poconos Mountains. As with any tourism property, we are special. The Shawnee Inn and Golf Resort is an independently owned property. Our reliance on the marketing campaigns launched by our regional tourism bureau and other state agencies and associations is instrumental to our survival and many other properties similar to ours. I understand that budgets are tight, not only at a property level, but also on a state level where balancing the welfare of many competing interests is a challenge.

For the Pocono Mountains and surrounding areas, tourism has long been a vital economic driver for our region. In 2010, a DCED report stated that nearly 35% of the labor force in the Pocono Mountains is tied to tourism, making the Pocono Mountains area the most tourism dependant region in the Commonwealth.

This is an important reason why I am interested in the formation of an agency whose sole purpose is to ensure the viability and foster the growth of the tourism industry. As

the 2nd largest industry in Pennsylvania, with over 400,000 jobs created and 3 billion dollars generated in tax revenue to the state, a public – private agency dedicated to tourism is worthy of consideration.

Continuing to market Pennsylvania as a viable tourist destination would be a prudent investment in Pennsylvania's future. 2/3 of the visitors to the Pocono Mountains and consequently the revenue generated from visitor spending of 2.1 billion come from non-residents. This influx of "new money" secures jobs and tax dollars from visitors who do not use our social services.

I, along with the Pocono Mountain Vacation Bureau, support the creation of the Pennsylvania Tourism Commission as an agency that has the potential to encourage innovation, creativity and accountability across a more long term, stable environment.

This proposed public-private partnership would provide an excellent framework to strategically promote Pennsylvania as a top tier tourism destination and would prove to be a very sound investment in the future of Pennsylvania's economic vitality.

Marketing works. The Pocono Mountains grew to prominence as a "honeymoon destination" through the implementation and support of a strong marketing campaign that stretched across decades. This consistency supplied strength and focus to maintain a high level of exposure and interest in the region. I see the formation of the

Pennsylvania Tourism Commission as a private – public agency, as an opportunity to encourage a laser like focus to marketing Pennsylvania s a destination. This agency will foster the needed continuity through administration changes that will give tourism the consistent attention it deserves and maintain or improve Pennsylvania's position as one of the top five states visited in this country.

Thank you.

