

July 31, 2013

Representative Ron Miller

Testimony before House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee- HB 1486

Good morning Chairman Stern, Chairman Kirkland and members of the committee. Thank you for holding this hearing on the room tax and allowing me to offer testimony on my legislation, HB 1486.

Like all of you I am quite proud of the district I represent and all of York County. York County is steeped in history with a claim to being the first Capitol of the United States, has managed to maintain a strong manufacturing and industrial base (including a Harley Davidson plant and visitors center), is home to two very good colleges, and is a strong retail center with the Hanover Borough/ Penn Township area being ranked in the top seven retail areas of the state.

Thanks to great vision by past boards of County Commissioners, and strong support from the current Board of Commissioners, we have 11 County parks with over 4,300 acres, two museums, a nature center and preserved historic sites. The Heritage Rail Trail Park is a linear park along the Northern Central Railway that continues to be expanded. The park now extends from the Maryland line (the trail continues approximately 21 miles in Maryland to the Cockeysville area) to John Rudy County Park north of the city of York with work in progress to complete a final section at the north side of the city. A private nonprofit group, Steam into History recently invested millions of dollars to build and operate a steam train on the rail line to chronicle the role of York County in Civil War history and to promote the area as a tourist destination. I recently had the opportunity to experience this ride with a stop at Hanover Junction where President Lincoln passed through several times including his trip to deliver the Gettysburg Address and his final trip on his funeral train.

Combine all this with three state parks, the Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Region along the Susquehanna River- our shared border with Lancaster County, and one of the most successful farm land preservation efforts in the state, and you gain some insight into why residents treasure our county and why we have been one of the fastest growing population areas of the state for the past 50 years.

You may now be wondering why the area I just described would desire the ability to raise the room tax from 3 to 5% as I propose enabling the York County Commissioners to do in HB 1486? To understand this issue we need to look at the areas surrounding York County because despite all of our blessings, York County is surrounded by international tourism destinations. Lancaster County to the east has the attraction of the Amish and has benefited from marketing this unique tourism experience. Adams County to the west, as we all were reminded by the recent 150th anniversary events, has Gettysburg where the most historic battle and turning point of our Civil War occurred. To the northeast, Dauphin County has Hershey and the very successful promotion of Hershey Chocolate and a great amusement park. To the north we have the State Capitol and we're all aware of the magnificence of this Capitol complex. To the south we compete with Baltimore and the largest estuary in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay. As a destination where people stay and eat and shop and produce all the economic

good to the local and state economy that tourism provides, York County often must work harder than the larger tourism venues surrounding us.

While we are in the center of international attractions, tourism in York County generates a healthy \$850 million per year in revenue and brings in \$83.2 million in state and local taxes. To explain this success you need to understand the use of the room tax at 3% in York County over the past 13 years. York County's appointed Tourism Promotion Agency, the York County Convention and Visitors Bureau, has aggressively marketed York as a destination for various state, national, and international groups. A unique partnership between the York County Agricultural Society that operates the York Expo Center, the County Parks system, lighted ball field venues at Hoffman Park in York City, a city owned ice arena, and many other private and government venues, has attracted tremendous amounts of overnight stays in York County. Some examples of large events hosted in York County include:

Customers that have been with us for decades include the National Street Rods Association, Train Collectors Association, and Order of the Eastern Star. New events coming to York include the 2014 Can-Am Police and Fire Games and the 2015 American Truck Historical Society Convention at the York Expo Center. The Can-Am Games will bring over 2,000 first responders to our region for 9 days of Olympic style and professional competition. This will mark the first time that a Pennsylvania city will host this international event. York County had to win this bid from stiff competition including Green Bay, Wisconsin.

In addition, by partnering with 60 businesses in our region, the York County Convention and Visitors Bureau is promoting 3 strong tourism products. "Factory Tour Capitol of the World" is a partnership with companies including Harley Davidson, UTZ Quality Foods, and many others. "Mason -Dixon Wine Trail" includes 26 wineries in 5 counties and 2 states. "Susquehanna Ale Trail" includes 15 breweries in 3 counties. Local room tax dollars supported development of these tourism trails and the visitation they generate. The York County Convention and Visitors Bureau owns federal trademarks to all of these.

This legacy is impressive and was developed through use of the York County room tax and state funding. But remember, the high point in state grant funding was reached in 2009 at a level of \$234,000. In 2013 there is no state grant money available.

I mentioned the unique relationship between the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the York Expo Center. The Expo Center is our de facto Convention Center and together they work to attract the large events that bring significant numbers of tourists to York County. To attract these groups requires expenditures to support the groups bringing the events to the area. This is not unique to York, any large group can command support from the local government or TPA and indeed it is part of the bidding process when a venue competes to host the event. The increased revenue from a room tax increase will allow the Convention and Visitors Bureau and their partners to continue what they have done successfully for over a decade.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. I'd be happy to answer your questions.