



March 27, 2024

Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman and House Finance Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bill 7688 and Senate Bill 2343

Dear Chairman Abney and House Finance Committee,

I am writing to express gratitude for your anticipated support of House Bill 7688 and addressing An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government- Tourism and Development, 42-63.1-3.

In 1995, the General Assembly passed legislation to aid the RI Convention Center by redirecting 5% of statewide hotel tax revenue to the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau (PWCVB). This was due to a shortage of hotel rooms in Providence for large conventions. Over nearly three decades, this tax has been collected statewide, including in South County as a subsidy for the PWCVB.

Since then, Providence has substantially increased its hotel room capacity as well as adding another revenue stream via the Tourism Improvement District (TID), thus rendering the initial need obsolete. Yet, funds collected from our hotels continue to be redirected to the PWCVB. This practice of inequity has caused a tremendous strain on South County's ability to grow at the pace we believe is possible.

South County Tourism Council has expanded its off-season offerings with notable events like the International Atlantis Rising Sand Sculpting Competition and the creation of the Rhode Island Troll Trail. If these funds were properly directed, we would have the chance to collaborate and further develop off season programs and events.

It is imperative to rectify this disparity to enable us to develop and promote our region effectively. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any inquiries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cary Callahan', written over a horizontal line.

Cary Callahan, Executive Director