



**Comments of Roy Nascimento
President & CEO
New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce**

**Before the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development
Friday, June 21, 2013 11:00 a.m.**

Chair Atkins and Members of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

My name is Roy Nascimento, President and CEO of the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is the region's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan business organization with nearly 1,000 member businesses, mainly small businesses, including members in the hospitality and tourism industries.

On behalf of the Chamber, I want to thank you for launching your legislative listening tour in our beautiful region of the state! We believe that we have much to offer visitors from beautiful beaches and fascinating museums to wonderful dining and shopping experiences and we are very excited to showcase the region to the committee! We also appreciate the opportunity to speak today on this important economic development issue.

As you know, Tourism is one of the largest industries in Massachusetts. The industry is driving \$16.9 billion in direct spending, over \$1 billion in state and local taxes and supporting 124,700 jobs. In our region alone it accounts for over 3,000 jobs and over \$400 million worth of industry-related revenue. Tourism is also a growing industry. While employment in many industries is challenged, jobs in the tourism industry are growing. Tourism also supports existing companies and stimulates new business development, diversifying the economy and attracting businesses who want a wide variety of amenities for their employees.

As way of background, our region's tourism efforts have suffered in recent years due to the economic downturn and loss of confidence in our regional tourism council, which is called the Southeastern Mass Convention and Visitors Bureau. This had resulted in our region losing out in competitive state tourism grants that are available to support marketing our attractions and businesses. Recognizing the significant economic impact and potential for the region, the business community has been actively involved in efforts to revive the region's tourism efforts. In today's highly competitive travel marketplace, our region needs to have a viable, working and productive marketing program to grow our share of the tourism business. It also must be regional in scope, as resources are better leveraged when communities work together for the collective good. So over the last year, we have partnered with the other four chambers of commerce in our county – the United Regional Chamber (Attleboro); Fall River Area Chamber; Taunton Area Chamber; and Tri-Town Chamber of Commerce (Mansfield & Norton) as well as our members in the tourism industry - to lead a regional effort to revamp and strengthen Bristol County's tourism efforts. We have met with tourism officials from the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism, members of our legislative delegation, city and local officials, and representatives of the media, and we have hosted several forums with members in the hospitality and tourism industries from throughout Southeastern Massachusetts to gain their input.

Much work remains to be done, but in a very short period of time, we have begun to turn things around. Collectively we have taken over the operations of the convention and visitors bureau and we have applied for tourism grants, organized workshops and training programs for the tourism and hospitality industries, participated in travel shows to market the region as a destination, responded to inquires from tour operators and visitors to our area, and in July we will be launching a new website to promote Southeastern Massachusetts to travelers – www.visitsemass.org. This is a positive story. It has been a model of regional collaboration. Many people were involved and need to be thanked. I need to start with our legislative delegation. I would like to applaud the combined Bristol County legislative delegation for their direct involvement and tireless advocacy for reviving the convention and visitors bureau and making sure that our region is effectively promoted. While the entire delegation has been supportive, and I want to point out that it has been a bipartisan effort, I would be remiss if I didn't single out Senators Rodrigues and Montigny and Representatives Cabral and Schmid for leading the charge among the delegation. I would like to publically acknowledge and thank them for their support.

I would also like to thank the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) for their support of our efforts to revive the convention and visitors bureau and for their partnership in promoting the state. We have two officials from MOTT with us today – Lisa Simmons and Daniela Di Carlo - and I think their participation today speaks volumes for MOTT's support and commitment to our region. Lisa and Daniela - thank you for attending and for everything you and your colleagues do to promote our state!

I would also like to thank the legislature for funding the regional tourism councils at \$7.5 million in the FY2014 budget proposal as this funding is crucial to our efforts to revive the convention and visitors bureau and effectively promote the region.

However, I did want to take this opportunity to urge the legislature to provide adequate funding for MOTT. We are hopeful that your colleagues on the conference committee will understand the importance of funding this item at minimum at the House level of \$13.1 million. I would like to point out that these line items are charged to the Tourism Fund Account, so the funds are available for the higher appropriation level due to the steadily increasing room rental surcharges.

Additionally, all the states around us, our competitors for traveler dollars, are increasing their competitive edge by investing in much higher levels to attract visitors. New York is investing \$60 million; New Jersey is \$25 million; and Connecticut is \$27 million.

If Massachusetts is to compete in the effort to draw more visitors to our state – and return more tax revenue to the state coffers – adequate funding of the regional tourism councils and MOTT is critical. These are the organizations that are marketing our state to visitors and generating a strong return on investment.

Finally, I wanted to thank the legislature for including in the casino legislation a requirement that a portion of the Gaming Licensing Funds go towards the Mass Tourism Fund and a new Gaming Economic Development Fund. While we appreciate that the enabling legislation includes these provisions, we would encourage the legislature to ensure that those funds are going to support regional tourism as stipulated in the statutory language. These funds will help our regions capitalize on the tourism potential of casinos and also help to remediate the negative impacts to

local small businesses that could potentially be hurt by the development of gaming in their regions.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify today. This is an important issue for our region, which has historically suffered from high unemployment. Tourism for us represents much needed jobs, it represents new investment in our communities, and it represents tax revenue for our cities and towns. The bottom line is that Tourism represents opportunity for Southeastern Massachusetts!

Thank you again for your support!