

**Senate Tourism & Recreational Development Committee**

**Remarks by Deputy Secretary Carrie Lepore, DCED**

**June 3, 2015**

Good morning, Chairwoman Ward, Chairman Wiley and members of the Senate Community, Economic & Recreational Development. I'm Carrie Lepore, Deputy Secretary for Marketing, Tourism and Film at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, to represent Governor Wolf and DCED Secretary Davin, and to speak about our vision for supporting tourism in Pennsylvania.

The last two months in this role have felt like a homecoming of sorts for me. I first joined DCED in 2003 as Communications Director for the Pennsylvania Tourism Office.

I spent four wonderful years promoting Pennsylvania as a travel destination to media outlets nationwide. And to this day I wear as a badge of honor that I attended four Groundhog Day celebrations, four Little League World series, and traveled to practically every one of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

I'm also proud of the fact that DCED has continued to use the keystone icon on all marketing materials. The keystone was part of a branding initiative that identified it as an iconic image and a strength that only Pennsylvania could claim. Having a distinct brand has never been more important to our future success.

I am here to share with you - first and foremost – that we have a lot to celebrate about the strength of the Pennsylvania tourism product. I am pleased to report that in 2014:

- Pennsylvania’s hoteliers sold a record number of hotel rooms – well over 30 million in total for the year, which was the highest number ever for the state.
- The revenue generated by the sale of those hotel rooms was also the highest ever – at almost \$3.4 billion.
- Based on the hotel industry’s impressive performance, I won’t be surprised to see that our travel and tourism industry hosted 200 million travelers, or close to that number, last year, when the final numbers come in.
- That’s quite an increase compared to the 173 million from back when I first started in 2003.

As you know, Pennsylvania is home to a robust and diverse tourism product – from outdoor recreation and historic cities to cultural attractions and natural beauty second to none. But, travel and tourism is a highly competitive global industry where promotion is increasingly critical to driving visitation; marketing is vital to truly engage consumers and stay top of mind.

To market the commonwealth as a premier destination for leisure, business, and international travel, Pennsylvania’s Marketing, Tourism, and Film Office must keep our finger on the pulse of what consumers want today, and take an informed approach to how we position and promote the state to encourage economic growth.

In fact, the research recently commissioned by the Pennsylvania Tourism Partnership (PTP) Steering Committee validates much of our current strategy. I’d like to take a few moments to walk you through our multi-faceted approach to marketing Pennsylvania.

A recent study suggests short-stay trips and mini vacations are increasingly popular among consumers, as are personalization and authentic experiences. Pennsylvania is well-positioned to take advantage of these trends. We’re located within a day’s drive of 50 percent of the U.S. population and within an hour or two of international tourism hubs such as Washington, D.C. and New York City. And we offer the kind of robust tourism product that can meet the needs of the most diverse and demanding travelers.

To capitalize on our reputation as a drive-to destination, we've created more than 50 customized online road trips featuring everything from outdoor adventures and brewery/wine trails to farmers markets and kid-friendly itineraries. These road trips help inspire travel to each region of the state and serve as the cornerstone of our media relations.

Pennsylvania has an incredible travel story to share with regional, national, and international media. In 2014 alone, our team interacted with 200 journalists to obtain more than 230 feature travel placements reaching over 1.2 billion readers – a 22 percent increase from 2013. Successful media events in Washington, D.C., New York City and media marketplaces help keep Pennsylvania on the front page.

We also know today's traveler is tech savvy. Our website is particularly important, as travelers typically visit 22 websites over 9.5 web-sessions when researching a trip. We're proud to report that our web traffic is up 45 percent over last year. The Tourism Office recently revamped visitPA.com to ensure it serves as an online and interactive snapshot of each region throughout the state to inspire the 2-3 million visitors to the website each year. This content is also shared with the nearly 200,000 people who receive our monthly e-newsletter, with editorial suggestions from our partners across the state.

The 2015 Vacation Guide, released in time for the spring/summer travel season, showcases a special "Fan-Friendly" section highlighting game-changing experiences for sports enthusiasts, from Pennsylvania's eight minor league baseball parks to the Pocono Raceway. The guide also includes a round-up of Pennsylvania's most famous foods in "State on a Plate," and a photo essay on the ever-changing colors of the commonwealth's lush backdrops.

The Tourism Office also represents the entire state beyond our borders through important partnerships with organizations like Brand USA, tasked with leading the United States' marketing efforts globally. Brand USA gives the Tourism Office an opportunity to promote all of the state's assets to a growing audience of international travelers seeking to visit and spend money in the U.S. In fact, international visitor spending in 2013 in Pennsylvania totaled \$3.4 billion.

Last but not least, we're committed to taking full advantage of the marketing opportunities offered by social media. It's no surprise that 74 percent of travelers use social media while on vacation, and 76 percent of travelers use social media to share their experiences after they return.

The Tourism Office continues to view social media as an extremely cost-effective method to promote the "Pennsylvania brand," as well as specific destinations, events and attractions throughout the commonwealth, to a growing cadre of dedicated fans and followers (growing by 10-35 percent annually, depending on the channel). Each day, we reach more than 300,000 travelers with every tweet, post, pin, photo, and list reminding travelers of the experiences only available in Pennsylvania.

Marketing is critical to tourism, and tourism is critical to Pennsylvania's economy. The industry generates \$4 billion in state and local tax revenue, infuses \$39.2 billion in tourism spending into the economy, and employs 478,000 in Pennsylvania.

Our office and the Wolf Administration remain committed to supporting and collaborating with every aspect of the tourism industry – hotels, meeting facilities, attractions, cultural institutions, recreation, restaurants, transportation, retail, agriculture, manufacturing and much more.

The challenge is to continue to grow the industry and create jobs that pay in a highly competitive marketplace, where consumers have more choices than ever before on where to spend their hard-earned travel dollars. How do we compete and continue to grow such a critical industry?

I believe the answer starts with true collaboration and that will be at the heart of my vision to support tourism in Pennsylvania.

My experience as Communications Director for the Tourism Office taught me the value of collaboration with other state agencies like the Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources, Transportation and Agriculture, as well as the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Game Commission, Historical Museum Commission and Council on the Arts

We worked successfully together to promote Pennsylvania's incredible assets like our state parks, game lands, streams, rivers and lakes, and we joined forces on important initiatives such as the Pennsylvania Wilds branding and the opening of 7 new Welcome Centers. I'm committed to making collaboration a priority, and I'm really excited about opportunities like working with Agriculture to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pennsylvania Farm Show in January 2016 and Gifford Pinchot's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration.

There is no question that partnership with our 49 convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs) and engaging Pennsylvania's diverse stakeholders – in both the public and private sector – are critical. In my first eight weeks, I've attended the annual Pennsylvania Association of Travel & Tourism (PATT) and have met or am scheduled to meet with nearly 30 CVB and association representatives. I've also hosted meetings with PATT, the PTP, and a variety of tourism associations.

I plan to travel as much as possible and visit local tourism officials, as I have already done in Butler County, the Poconos, Pittsburgh, the Philadelphia suburbs and here in central Pennsylvania.

I want everyone on this panel today to be part of the creation of our tourism road map for the future, to help us determine how best to invest tourism dollars into marketing that continues to drive economic growth.

I look forward to working with you all to grow the tourism industry in Pennsylvania. I'd be happy to take your questions.