

David A. Kaufman
7 Windsor Court
South Burlington, VT 05403
802-864-4357 (home) 802-863-1122 (mobile)
Email: vtourism@together.net or david.kaufman@uvm.edu

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Department of Tourism and Marketing Funding

Testimony presented by David Kaufman (background):

- Lecturer – Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Program, UVM
Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
Since 1980, 28 years part-time, 6 years full-time
- Tourism Marketing Company owner, 25 years
- Assistant to Vermont Director of Tourism (pre-commissioner), 1980's
- Ski Resort Manager, Mount Snow, 1970's
- Five-term House member, Vermont General Assembly, South Burlington, 1981 – 1990
Chair, House Transportation Committee

Tourism is an essential driver of Vermont's economy and has been for many years. Typically, the tourism business is perceived as attracting visitors from outside Vermont, as well as our own residents, who participate in one or more tourism experiences and spend money, contributing to Vermont's total state revenue stream and local and state tax coffers.

When I was an active participant in the tourism business, I perceived my role as marketing to tourists, convincing them to visit Vermont, ensuring a high quality tourism experience and producing revenue for private business or the state in general.

Early on as an educator, I quickly came to recognize that teaching students about the fields of recreation and tourism would result in new, young, ambitious, enthusiastic, high energy young men and women prepared to launch careers in some aspect or another of these broad fields.

Today, as a full time faculty member, my greatest contribution to the tourism industry in Vermont is that I am continuing to prepare students for a future career in the industry; students are our future industry leaders!

Our students are (mostly!) engaged and enthusiastic about a future in recreation and tourism. To successfully complete their educations and become involved in the industry, they not only need to learn in the classroom, but need hands-on experience in the form of internships, which often lead to full time employment upon graduation. The success of our graduates proves that the "formula" of education / internship / good job works!

In order to have the inventory of both internship opportunities and job opportunities, Vermont must have a healthy tourism industry to support the students and offer them these opportunities. Tourism is a VERY competitive business! Vermont competes 365 days a year (except perhaps the few weeks each fall and spring when we all think about where else we might want to be!), with our immediate neighbors, the National Parks, Disney, tropical beaches, other tourism destinations in the USA and indeed worldwide.

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Competing effectively costs money and Vermont needs to spend enough to maintain a strong competitive position in the marketplace. The fact is, Vermont spends less today than we did a few years ago. While our VDTM does an excellent job at using limited funds as strategically as possible, we are generally behind our competitors when it comes to funds available to maintain the essential strong presence in our primary markets. While it may seem we have a strong competitive position, and we do when it comes to winter sports in the East, we are challenged in the peak warm seasons when all destinations “battle” for market share.

A more consistent and secure budget for VDTM would enable better and longer term strategic planning, better market penetration, a stronger social media presence, and more consistent overall recognition of Vermont in the marketplace as a destination worth visiting, or returning to.

Finally, we all know that Vermont is an “old” state, having one of the oldest populations in the country. The only way to bring down the average age of Vermonters is to provide excellent career opportunities for our young people. A robust recreation and tourism industry provides such opportunities for young Vermonters. This industry will remain robust only if it is healthy. Only by ensuring that we are adequately marketing tourism and recreation will we continue to provide these opportunities to our young people, enabling them to remain in Vermont and contribute to our economy and a more balanced demographic mix. I see this as absolutely essential to Vermont’s future!

I therefore encourage the Vermont General Assembly to recognize the investment value of marketing tourism and to enact a more dependable funding stream for use by the VDTM in its efforts to promote Vermont and secure market share.

Thank you; I am happy to answer any questions.