



MICHIGAN SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

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Comments by Steve Kershner for the Senate Committee on Tourism

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My name is Steve Kershner and I am the Director of Snowsports at Shanty Creek Resorts in Bellaire and also president of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association, which represents Michigan's ski areas, ski and snowboard retailers and other related businesses. On behalf of the snowsports industry, I am here to ask you to support Senate Bill 110 to fund the Pure Michigan ad campaign. I speak for the entire ski industry by saying we are strong supporters of Travel Michigan and the award-winning Pure Michigan campaign.

The Michigan Snowsports Industry, or MSIA, develops programs to broaden the awareness of skiing and snowboarding and to introduce people to our sports. In Michigan, travel for winter sporting activities is a **\$4.4 billion industry that accounts for one third of the state's leisure travel**. Think about that for a minute if you would. **WINTER ACCOUNTS FOR ONE THIRD OF MICHIGAN'S LEISURE TRAVEL.**

That's easy to understand, once you see some of our world-class resorts, great ski slopes and wonderful snowmobile trails. It's interesting, no matter where you live in Michigan, you are no farther than a two-hour drive to a ski area. Colorado and Utah can't say that! Of the four states that border us – Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin—when it comes to winter recreation, we're the best game in town. Michigan has more ski areas and more registered snowmobiles than any other state.

Humans were never meant to hibernate. We believe that it is important for all of us – especially our children – to get out and exercise during the winter. That's why MSIA has created affordable learn-to-ski programs, and special programs for kids.

MSIA's Discover Michigan Skiing is a statewide learning program run each January. Participants get ski or snowboard rental equipment, a lesson and lift ticket or trail pass, all starting at just \$20. This is a fantastic bargain and a wonderful way to become familiar with the great winter activities that are available to all of us. We've introduced over 125,000 people to our ski slopes and trail through Discover Michigan Skiing.

Because it is so important for our children to "get out, have fun and get healthy" during the winter, MSIA has developed inexpensive school field trips and a special Cold is Cool 4th Grade Ski and Ride Passport, which allows all 4th graders to ski free all winter long. We chose 4th grade because 9- and 10-year-olds are coordinated and fearless enough to learn quickly, and 4th grade is also the year that students study Michigan history. What better way to explore our state than on skis in the winter!

Michigan has the winter programs, the wonderful ski facilities and unequivocally the best natural resources around. Now, we just need to spread the word! I am pleased to say that this winter, for the first time, MSIA and Travel Michigan partnered on a Pure Michigan co-op advertising campaign. With matching funds, we were able to create radio ads that directed listeners to the Michigan.org website, where they could gain valuable information about winter travel and MSIA's programs. We are in the midst of the campaign now, but I can provide you with some preliminary data. To date, our website visits have increased by 64 percent over last winter. Plus, the pass-throughs from the Michigan.org site to MSIA's site have increased by over 580 percent. This campaign was made possible because legislation during lame duck last year provided \$1.5 million for the Pure Michigan winter ad campaign.

Shanty Creek Resorts perspective. The Pure Michigan campaign and the state's tourism industry has been a vital component of traffic and revenue for many northern Michigan resorts, many of whom represent the largest employers for their prospective counties including the resort I represent, Shanty Creek Resorts in Bellaire in Antrim County.

SCR is a four-season golf and ski resort operating over 500 lodging options for leisure and recreational travel, plus events and conferences serving state and national associations, corporate and SMERF retreats and destination weddings. Recreationally our golf and ski amenities rank among the highest in state. And this is where Pure Michigan has the power to impact tourism and its related revenue streams.

The beauty of northern Michigan's environment is well known to our in-state residents. However that awareness begins to wane outside of Michigan's borders. Since Pure Michigan's campaign launch we've seen our guest mix shift from approximately 85/15 in-state vs out-of-state to 75/25. And while the mix has only shifted by 10 percent, it's important to realize SCR's overall occupancy percentages have steadily increased during the past 6 years. So the shift of in-state/out-of-state represents that much more new out of state. Primarily the fringe states of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio have impacted those results

We live in a state that turns cold for three months each year. Let's celebrate this season and bring in additional revenue by showcasing winter sports to our neighboring states.

As you have heard from others, every dollar invested in the Pure Michigan campaign has come back three-fold in sales tax revenue. **We are not asking you to spend, but rather to invest.** On behalf of the Snowsports industry – including the resorts, ski areas, Mom and Pop motels, the gas stations, the taverns and restaurants – I am asking you to pass Senate Bill 110 to fund the Pure Michigan advertising campaign, and include language to **specifically fund winter advertising.**

It is imperative that the momentum of the Pure Michigan campaign continues. Michigan is truly a winter wonderland. After all, what is more "Pure Michigan," than our driven snow?

Thank you.