



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

HB 5017-18

HB 5088-89

PRESENTED TO THE

**Tourism, Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources Committee
House of Representatives
State of Michigan**

PRESENTED BY

**Greg Ayers, President
Kalamazoo County Convention & Visitors Bureau**

**Tuesday, June 16, 2009
10:30 a.m. EDT
521 House Office Building – Lansing, MI**

DiscoverKalamazoo

ORAL STATEMENT OF GREG AYERS
PRESIDENT, KALAMAZOO COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
TOURISM, OUTDOOR RECREATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2009

To Chairman Sheltroun and distinguished members of the Tourism, Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bills 5017, 5018, 5088 and 5089. Otherwise known as the *Pure Michigan* funding package, these bills will establish the permanent funding sources necessary to maintain and grow our award-winning tourism campaign!

Good Morning! My name is Greg Ayers, and I have the pleasure of serving as the President of the Kalamazoo County Convention & Visitors Bureau. Representing a community of nearly a quarter of a million people, I can assure you tourism is an extremely important industry in our local economy. The last studies available to us indicated more than \$200 million is spent annually by visitors, which helps support nearly 5,000 jobs in the hospitality industry.

As we all know, the commitment the State has made in its allocation of \$30 million to fund the *Pure Michigan* advertising campaign has been noticed by many. From the significant increase of visitor inquiries realized by the campaign from potential visitors throughout the United States, we are now beginning to share with thousands what we have all known for years – Michigan is a great visitor destination! I would also suggest the campaign has successfully reintroduced Michigan to those who have previously visited, but maybe not recently. It has also given our residents a reminder of the many, many attributes we possess even in a very difficult economy.

As a destination marketing organization for one of Michigan's more urban centers, we in Kalamazoo are excited the *Pure Michigan* campaign features more than just the wonderful natural resources of our state. Our metropolitan destinations have so much to offer, especially in the area of cultural tourism. Please allow me to share just a sample of what our metropolitan destinations offer:

- The Detroit Institute of Arts creates experiences that help each visitor find personal meaning in art.
- The Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids is a 132-acre attraction featuring the most comprehensive outdoor sculpture collection in the Midwest.
- The Flint Cultural Center takes one on a journey of discovery and imagination to a place to experience entertainment, embrace knowledge and dream.

- The Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing tells the story of Michigan's past from precontact through the late 20th century.
- The Marshall Fredericks Sculpture Museum at Saginaw Valley State University fosters the appreciation of artistic expression for the educational and cultural enrichment of the community.
- The Midland Center for the Arts includes the Hall of Ideas where a science museum is dedicated to the explanation of the world's natural wonders.
- The Air Zoo in Kalamazoo includes the Michigan Space Science Center and expands one's awareness and brings the total flight experience to life.

I could continue as the list is endless with appeal to many diverse audiences. Combined with a myriad of performing arts and a plethora of professional sports, Michigan's urban destinations provide visitors with a tremendous variety of activities for all to enjoy. Our variety of meeting venues and outstanding sports facilities are supported by a large quantity of accommodations, restaurants, shopping and nightlife positioning Michigan as a great destination for the visitor seeking this type of entertainment.

The destination marketing organizations representing the urban centers of Michigan collectively spend a significant amount of time and money in the pursuit of group business, specifically in the attraction of meeting and convention business as well as the fastest-growing market segment – sports tournaments. I don't know of any of our destinations who would attend a show to meet event planners, experience success and then no longer attend the show. The same should be said for the *Pure Michigan* campaign. Now is not the time to have a "one-and-done" approach to something which has excited and unified the entire tourism industry of Michigan.

As I draw my comments to a close, I want to share a personal experience with you. This past weekend, I was returning to Michigan after a brief visit with family in Illinois. As I entered into our state on I-94, I could not help but notice the number of billboards represented by our industry and specifically by destinations. We are doing our best as an industry to welcome people to Michigan and to have them choose our hotels, restaurants, attractions and golf courses. But to realize our greatest potential, we need the national campaign very few (if any) of us can afford on our own to introduce our great state to potential visitors. We have an excellent opportunity to sustain and grow one of Michigan's best assets – the tourism industry. I invite you to join our industry and implement the funding sources needed for the *Pure Michigan* campaign to continue exciting potential visitors and our residents. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to entertain any questions you may have.