

Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee

Hearing on SB 110

Room 210 Farnum Building

February 10, 2011

**Testimony of Laurie Supinski, Executive Director, Newaygo County
Convention & Visitors Bureau**

I am here this morning to express my support for SB 110 on behalf of the Newaygo County Convention & Visitors Bureau, The Newaygo County Economic Development Office, and as a private business owner.

Newaygo County is located in the heart of West Michigan, has 234 lakes, over 350 miles of rivers and streams and over 100,000 acres of national forest. We attract visitors from all over the country who come to our county to hike, fish, hunt, kayak and canoe, snowmobile, cross country ski, camp and for those who are less energetic, just plain relax and soak in the majestic beauty that surrounds us every day. We are located 190 miles from Detroit, 210 miles from Chicago, 220 miles from Toledo and 300 miles from Indianapolis all very drivable distances. However, we also attract visitors from New York, Texas, California, North Carolina for example which are states that also are destinations in and of themselves.

One of the hats that I wear is to run the Newaygo County Convention & Visitors Bureau and we are charged with promoting our region as a four season destination for overnight travelers. However, I am actually employed by the Newaygo County Economic Development Office because our county has determined that tourism is a key component of our economic development strategy. Tourism affects every single business in our community and while attracting visitors to Newaygo County is great for businesses such as hotels, gas stations, restaurants, grocery stores, campgrounds, retail stores, realtors, guide services, and provides a vast

amount of jobs within those areas, it also translates into more jobs and services throughout the entire our community.

The CVB's job is to bring people into our county and provide them with an experience that makes them want to return and to tell more people about our area. Our experience has been that often people return on a more permanent basis by either buying a second home on a lake or river, or even deciding to relocate here. They are attracted by a quality of life, our bountiful natural resources and the infrastructure such as our schools, high speed internet, and proximity to more urban areas and services such as Grand Rapids and the Kent County airport.

My husband and I run small lodge and fly fishing guide service on the Muskegon River and we entertain clients from all over the country on a regular basis. This weekend in fact, we will have couples coming in for a Valentine's Weekend getaway that includes fishing and a 5 course meal provided by a fabulous chef – the couples are from Chicago, Maryland and Ohio. Our lodge overlooks the river is on a private road where the other homes are all second homes, owned by people from Indiana, Chicago and Grand Rapids – all of whom invested in these properties because they first discovered the area by coming here for recreational purposes. These people pay taxes, spend money on food, home building and maintenance services and contribute in every way to Newaygo County's economy.

The state of Michigan faces some tough challenges in the months and years to come and we are certainly not a state who currently receives a lot of positive publicity. As efforts are underway to revive our struggling manufacturing sectors and bring new industries to the forefront, we hope for a turnaround in our economy. However some great positive news is that our State's tourism industry can thrive. Tourism is an industry that doesn't need to be created. Our natural resources and destinations are already here just waiting to be promoted, discover and experienced. The jobs at Michigan's hotels, golf courses, and ski resorts can never be outsources or relocated to other states.

The Pure Michigan ads whether they are on television, on the radio, or in print form have generated national acclaim. The Michigan.org website was voted the most visited tourism website in the country yet again. I challenge

you to view or listen to a Pure Michigan ad and not feel something. The ads are brilliant and go way beyond just promoting a location, a landmark or an activity. Not only do they tempt you to want to come to that lakeshore, that city, that golf course, or that river, but they make you want to feel the way you'd feel if you were there. They tug on an emotion and desire to escape to a peaceful place, almost within yourself – and that is why people love the campaign so much and why it is generating such acclaim. It allows people to put aside the negative images of Michigan that are portrayed in the media and see us in a different and appealing light.

Newaygo County has undoubtedly benefitted by the State's Pure Michigan campaign. Our CVB is linked to and listed on the Pure Michigan Michigan.org website and we are able to list our events, photos to reach a greater audience. Studies have shown that for every \$1 invested into promotion generates anywhere from \$2.22 to as much as \$5.34 in new sales taxes to Michigan. Our tourism industry is year-round and if promoted properly can keep existing jobs and create brand new jobs.

It is critical that we see passage of SB 110 which will provide short term funding for this year's Pure Michigan campaign and access to long term funding via the appropriations process. We need to continue a year-long, nationwide campaign that will bring more tourists, more jobs, more tax revenues and more investment in our great state.

Increasing state funding for tourism is the most secure investment in Michigan's economic future legislators can make. Please support SB 110.