

CASE STUDY

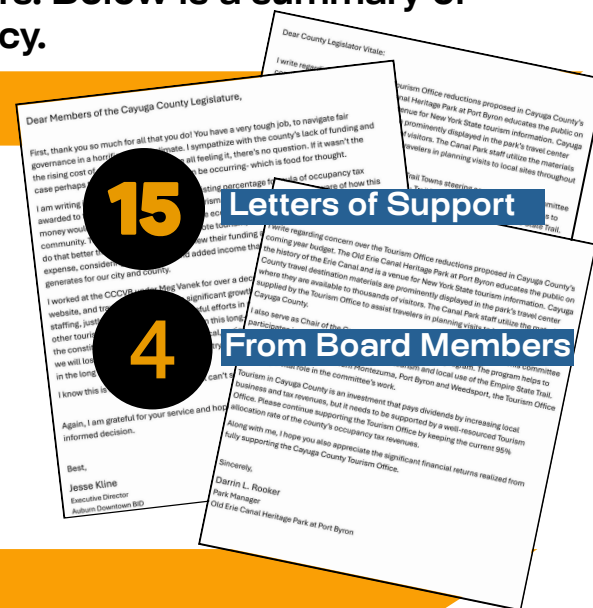
Preserving Tourism's Return on Investment:

Advocacy Actions and Outcomes

The proposed change to the occupancy tax local law, presented at the Cayuga County legislative meeting on August 26 at the Locke Fire Hall, to reduce the Tourism Office budget did not pass. This result was made possible by the united effort of staff, board members, and community partners. Below is a summary of actions taken and the impact of our collective advocacy.

Outreach Efforts

Tour Cayuga staff sent nearly 100 emails to tourism partners we've worked with in recent months. This included Sweet Treat Trail partners, Wheel the World accessibility participants, event grant recipients, H3C members, Cayuga Canal Trail Towns partners, and businesses engaged in recent press trips. From this effort, we received 15 letters of support, including 4 from board members. While this was encouraging, stronger board representation would have further elevated our message. All letters were entered into the legislative record and can be [viewed here](#).

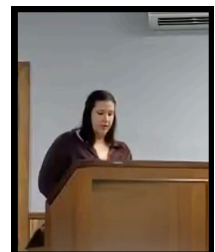


At the Legislative Meeting

A broad coalition of partners, board members, and staff attended the meeting in Locke, highlighting not only the economic value of tourism, but also its role in sustaining small businesses, nonprofits, and the broader community. Eleven organizations and all five staff members attended, either reading letters or making statement.

During the meeting :

- **Executive Director** spoke on budget realities and the spend multiplier.
- **Director of Marketing and Sales** emphasized group meetings and events.
- **Marketing Assistant and Office Administrator** read portions of partner letters.
- **Public Relations Manager** addressed the overall impact.
- **Amber Garsnett-Dagnesi** reminded legislators that the Tourism Office is “the sales arm of the county” urging them not to cut off their sales arm but instead to lean on it and learn from it.
- **Erin Katzker** underscored the vital role of nonprofit collaboration, especially since Cayuga County tourism is built primarily on small family-owned businesses and nonprofit organizations.
- **Jacob Hamilton and Colleen Weibel** brought an important perspective from small businesses owners in Locke/Moravia as well as the united support of the Locke/Moravia Chamber of Commerce.

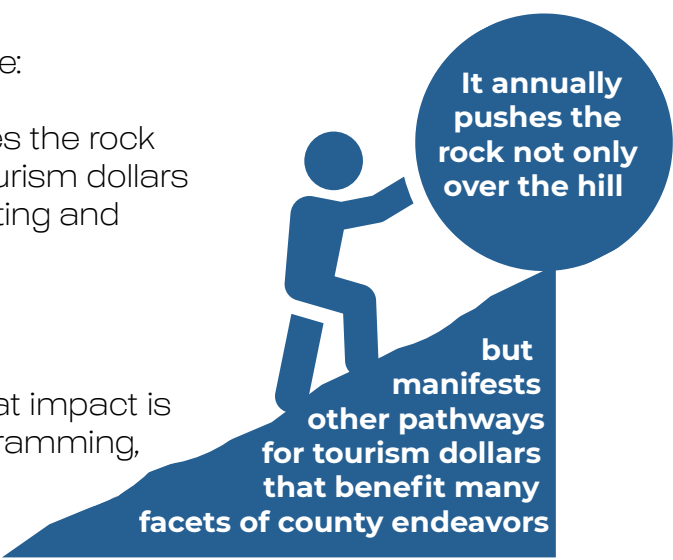


From the written testimony, **Bill Berry** (aaduna, Inc.) wrote:

“The Office of Tourism is not Sisyphus. It annually pushes the rock not only over the hill but manifests other pathways for tourism dollars that benefit many facets of county endeavors while uplifting and expanding citizen pride in our community.”

Susan Lemon (Fair Haven Arts Center) stated:

“Tour Cayuga delivers an outstanding level of impact. That impact is not coincidental, but the result of carefully executed programming, broad collaboration, and a commitment to elevating Cayuga County’s unique assets.”



The Numbers

The most recent Oxford Economics report on the economic impact of tourism in New York State was presented, including Cayuga County’s 2024 results: tourism delivers an approximate 10-to-1 return on investment (\$9.9 million in local sales tax from a \$1.2 million budget). Cayuga County ranked third out of 14 Finger Lakes counties for sales tax growth from tourism between 2023–2024. These findings reinforced that tourism funding is a proven driver of economic growth.



Together, these voices, community volunteers, nonprofit leaders, business owners, staff, and legislators, created a unified and credible message. Their advocacy was instrumental in preserving the Cayuga County Tourism Office budget.

Key Takeaways

This advocacy effort demonstrated the strength of our partnerships and the credibility of our collective voice. The Legislature’s decision to maintain our budget reflects the work of our staff, the support of our board, and the commitment of our partners. Moving forward, we will continue to strengthen advocacy efforts and ensure broader representation in future initiatives.

Although the proposal to amend the local law did not pass, the win was narrow: the vote was 5–5–1. Legislator Muldrow, attending via Zoom, dropped just before the vote was called. After the legislative meeting, Legislator Aileen McNabb Coleman’s support continued by stating: **“Tourism is not a slush fund. For every \$1 invested, our Tourism Office generates \$10 in sales tax revenue. Raiding this budget may seem like low-hanging fruit, but it’s a short-sighted move that risks long-term economic harm.”** Special acknowledgment is also due to Legislator Ben Vitale, whose leadership was central in opposing the proposed change.

RES #		2/3		MAJORITY	
		COUNT:	2/3 VOTE:	COUNT:	MAJORITY VOTE
DISTRICT:					
2	Benjamin Vitale	1		1	n
3	Tom Winslow	1		1	n
4	Robert Shea	1		1	y
5	Aileen McNabb-Coleman	1		1	n
6	Hans Pecher	1		1	y
7	Mark Strong	1		1	y
8	Heidi Nightengale	1		1	n
9	Elane Daly	1		1	y
10	Amy Sargent	1		1	n
11	Brian Muldrow	1		1	e
1	Jonathan Anna	1		1	y
TOTAL:			0		11