

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

JOINT RESOLUTION

AUTHORIZING APPROPRIATION OF FIVE MILLION DOLLARS (\$5,000,000) TO
COMMERCE RHODE ISLAND FOR EXPRESS PURPOSE OF PROVIDING BASE LEVEL
OPERATION FUNDS FOR LOCAL VISITOR CENTERS

Introduced By: Representatives Messier, Alzate, Stewart, Cruz, and Shallcross Smith

Date Introduced: May 31, 2023

Referred To: House Finance

1 WHEREAS, Welcome centers, also commonly known as visitors' centers, visitor
2 information centers, or tourist information centers, are buildings located at either entrances to
3 states on major ports of entry, such as interstates or major highways. These welcome centers,
4 which first opened on May 4, 1935 next to U.S. Route 12 in New Buffalo, Michigan, are
5 locations that serve as a rest area for motorists, a source of information for tourists or new
6 residents that enter a state or a region of a state, and a showcase for the state/region.

7 WHEREAS, Welcome centers can be thought as covering several different concepts:
8 state-owned and operated welcome centers near a state's border, state or municipal-owned and
9 operated visitors centers in cities or rural areas, and service plazas on toll roads, that are either
10 state-owned and operated, state-owned but operated by a private company, or privately owned
11 and operated. (Visitors' centers in cities can either be owned and operated by the state, a county, a
12 municipality, a local Chamber of Commerce, or be a joint effort between a county and/or a city
13 and a Chamber of Commerce to support and publicize a well-known tourist district, city, or
14 region.) States have different ways of naming welcome centers, but some of the most common
15 ones are welcome centers, visitor's centers, or visitor's information centers.

16 WHEREAS, Visitor centers help increase travel and tourism statewide.

17 WHEREAS, There exists several visitor centers located throughout the state consisting of
18 the following:

19 [Washington County](#)

1 Block Island-Block Island Tourism Council, Charlestown-Charlestown Chamber of
2 Commerce and Wakefield-South County Tourism Council

3 [Newport County](#)

4 Newport-Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau

5 [Providence County](#)

6 Central Falls-Blackstone Valley Visitors Center; with satellite locations in Pawtucket and
7 Woonsocket

8 WHEREAS, An example of the extraordinary positive impact visitor centers and the
9 organizations that manage visitor centers have on the quality of life for residents and visitors is
10 illustrated by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and the Blackstone Valley Visitors Center.

11 WHEREAS, Since 1985, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has been at the
12 forefront of sustainable destination development, place making, community building and
13 resiliency, and education. The Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that serves Rhode Island's ten (10)
14 Blackstone River Valley communities. It has a governing Board of Directors and is not
15 membership based. It serves the three hundred ten thousand (310,000) residents of Rhode Island's
16 Blackstone Valley. The Council is an environmental educator and operates the Blackstone Valley
17 Explorer, a forty (40) passenger Riverboat that takes students of all ages on the river and has just
18 opened the River Science Center at new offices located at 1420 Broad Street at Central Falls
19 Landing. The Council also produces the Dragon Boat Races held in Pawtucket, the Polar Express
20 Train Ride from the Depot in Woonsocket, manages the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center in
21 Pawtucket for over twenty-five (25) years, plus it works with the municipalities and state
22 agencies to improve the quality of life for our residents. BVTC efforts also include promotion of
23 local businesses which serve as destinations, marketing for the local food and drink industry to
24 the region, and spurring and facilitating activation of the Blackstone River through seasonal
25 events, river boat tours, the Taiwanese Dragon Boat Festival, and other major initiatives.

26 WHEREAS, The Council was the first destination in the world to receive the United
27 Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Ulysses Prize that merits distinction for
28 innovative contributions to tourism policy, tourism sustainable planning, environment protection
29 and new technologies. In 2006, the Council achieved the UNWTO'S best Certification in tourism
30 governance. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2008, recognized the
31 Blackstone Valley Tourism Council with their Tourism for Tomorrow Destination Award, the
32 most prestigious sustainable tourism development award in the world. In their comments, the
33 WTTC noted the Council's integrated, community-centered, resilient approach to tourism
34 development and community building.

1 WHEREAS, BVTC has three (3) locations throughout Northern Rhode Island
2 (Woonsocket, Central Falls and Pawtucket). In addition, BVTC's Pawtucket location is directly
3 adjacent to the Old Slater Mill-National Historic Park Site run by the National Park Service
4 (NPS). The Pawtucket Visitor's Center serves as the unofficial unfunded visitor's center for both
5 the NPS and the John Chafee National Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor that runs from
6 Pawtucket to the state's border in Woonsocket.

7 WHEREAS, The impact of reinvestment in the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center is
8 important for Pawtucket's growth. With the coming together of the community development
9 elements stated the results will bring about the cohesion needed for the city to grow. The
10 Blackstone Valley Visitor Center has three (3) entrances: one facing City Hall, one facing the
11 National Park and one facing Main Street. These strategic openings allow for people to access the
12 Blackstone Valley Visitor Center for business. Because the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center is
13 active, it has attracted the Rhode Island Football Club as a tenant and the Globaltise digital/video
14 production corporation as tenants. The Blackstone Valley Visitor Center's staff directs residents
15 and visitors to find the local shops, restaurants, and services to increase revenues locally and
16 state-wide; now, therefore be it

17 RESOLVED, That there is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the treasury not
18 otherwise appropriated for the fiscal year 2023-2024, the sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000)
19 to Commerce Rhode Island for the express and limited purpose of providing base level operation
20 funds for local visitor centers.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
JOINT RESOLUTION
AUTHORIZING APPROPRIATION OF FIVE MILLION DOLLARS (\$5,000,000) TO
COMMERCE RHODE ISLAND FOR EXPRESS PURPOSE OF PROVIDING BASE LEVEL
OPERATION FUNDS FOR LOCAL VISITOR CENTERS

- 1 This resolution authorizes the appropriation of the sum of five million dollars
- 2 (\$5,000,000) to Commerce Rhode Island for funding of local visitor centers.

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