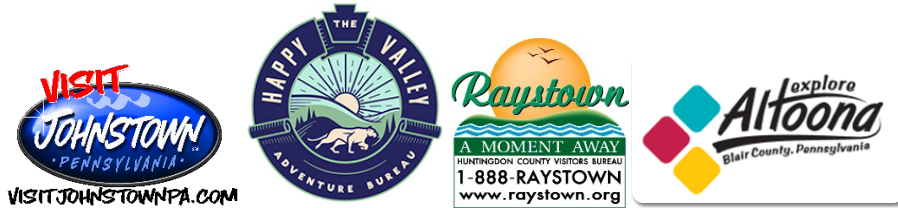


THE Alleghenies™



Paycheck Protection Program relief for DMOs necessary to continue vital economic recovery mission

State College, PA, June 29, 2020 – The leaders of four tourism promotion agencies representing the Alleghenies Region today urged Congress to extend Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) relief to destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and chambers of commerce.

Fritz Smith, President and CEO of The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau; Mark Ickes, Executive Director of Explore Altoona; Matt Price, Executive Director of the Raystown Lake Region; and Lisa Rager, Executive Director of Visit Johnstown, said PPP eligibility is critical to destination marketing organizations being able to continue a mission that is vital to the long-term economic health and well-being of the communities they serve. Their concerns echo a growing chorus of travel industry professionals nationwide advocating for organizations that are essential to helping drive economic recovery.

Currently, 501(c)(6) entities, including DMOs and chambers of commerce, are not able to participate in the PPP program, although there is growing support among federal lawmakers to extend eligibility. Several proposals, including a recently introduced U.S. Senate bill (S. 3992), are pending in Congress as elected officials consider additional COVID-19 relief measures.

“Organizations such as ours serve vital roles in bringing customers – visitors and local residents alike – through the doors of businesses severely impacted by COVID-19,” Smith said. “Yet, furloughs and layoffs have decimated the destination marketing and chamber of commerce industries as revenue streams have quickly dried up in the face of halted travel.”

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The tourism officials said a significant amount of time and resources go into ramping up marketing campaigns and developing messaging that encourages visitation when safe and appropriate to do so. The situation is preventing their organizations from being leaders in what is necessary to support the businesses and attractions that rely on tourism spending, which amounted to more than \$44 billion in Pennsylvania in 2018.

“As businesses re-open, DMOs need to be at the forefront of their destinations’ recovery,” said Rager, who testified as such before the state House Tourism Committee on June 3. “Yet, without assistance, we are trying to keep our own heads above water when we should be in the trenches helping.

“Our organizations will also be among the last to get back to where we were prior to March,” she added, noting that travel in general is not expected to start rebounding until Spring 2021 and hotel occupancy – a key factor in determining DMOs’ primary source of funding – is not expected to fully recover until 2023.

Price said the lack of meaningful assistance for DMOs also impacts a mission that helps sustain jobs in the hospitality industry.

“In Pennsylvania, nearly half a million people in the industry were unemployed as a result of COVID-19,” he said. “A strong tourism economy will help restore, keep and grow jobs that have been lost during the crisis.”

The leaders acknowledged that prior to COVID-19, the outlook for visitation in their destinations was on a positive trajectory, with plenty of momentum for the future.

“The opportunity for 501(c)(6) organizations to be eligible for a Paycheck Protection Program Loan may potentially solidify Explore Altoona’s and other DMOs’ return to full professional staffs in order to continue the prudent development of highly successful marketing programs that have assisted in producing positive results for the destinations they serve,” Ickes said.

Smith, Rager, Price and Ickes said they and their colleagues appreciate the complex decisions that have faced and continue to face lawmakers as they continue to grapple with the pandemic and its impacts. However, they said relief for DMOs and chambers of commerce is necessary to enhance and quicken overall economic recovery efforts.

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