



FLORIDA RESTAURANT & LODGING ASSOCIATION

March 29, 2021

Senator Jennifer Bradley
Chair, Committee on Community Affairs
Florida Senate
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

Dear Chair Bradley and Senators of the Florida Senate Community Affairs Committee,

As you well know, 2020 has been a challenging year for all industries in the state of Florida, but the tourism and hospitality industries have been hit especially hard. With shutdowns, travel restrictions, and a significant reduction in visitors, the revenue normally earned through tourism dollars plummeted. In 2020, visitors to Florida dropped from a record high of 134 million to just 86 million – the lowest in over a decade. Because tourism is the economic engine of the state and one of the top employers, the impact has stretched to other industries and the overall economic health of Florida. That's why it is even more important to protect our tourism dollars and the stated mission of those dollars – to promote tourism and bring back our guests.

Respectfully, we ask you to oppose Senate Bill 2008, an act relating to tourist and convention development taxes. The bill aims to expand the approved uses of Tourist Development Taxes and Convention Development Taxes to include flood mitigation projects and improvements. These taxes are critical to the continuing success and vitality of Florida's tourism industry. Allowing revenues to be diverted to projects unrelated to the marketing and advertising of tourism jeopardizes the efforts of our industry to revive and renew in the wake of the pandemic.

No one questions the nobility or necessity of addressing flood mitigation and the impact of sea level rise. In addition to the general budgeting authority granted to local governments to use their existing resources for flooding mitigation, there are several other existing and proposed financing and funding options that are designed specifically to address flooding issues. Diverting TDT and CDT funds for flooding mitigation, especially when there isn't even a required demonstration of a direct nexus to tourism, dilutes the effectiveness of these revenues and hurts Florida's communities who need these funds to attract visitors. Smaller communities will be especially hurt by the diversion of these funds to other non-tourism related projects.



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Tourism is Florida's largest industry and the biggest driver of our economy. Almost anything can be said to impact tourism. This does not mean that it falls within the original intent for the use of this particular stream of tax revenue. TDT and CDT revenues are specifically intended and desperately needed for tourism marketing and advertising. Florida's tourism industry drives our state's economy, and it is still a very long way from recovering from the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Promoting and marketing tourism in Florida is vital for our economic recovery and the long-term prosperity of our citizens and communities.

Please help us protect the tourism industry and the recovery of our state by opposing SB 2008.

Sincerely,

Carol B. Dover
President and CEO

Jim Shirley
Chairman of the Board

Olivia Hoblit
Vice Chair of the Board