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February 27, 2023

Re: Letter of Testimony Supporting the Addition of a Craft Beverage Council Position on the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing today to fully support the addition of a craft beverage position to the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council. There are now nearly 400 locally owned and operated craft beverage producers in all corners of our fabulous state. These small businesses have been revitalizing small downtowns and urban districts, attracting locals and tourists to come and sample their handmade products while showcasing their facilities via tours and interactive tasting and tap rooms that have become community gathering places. Craft beverage makers have passionate supporters, craft foodie tourism connections galore, and a heavily impactful media influence that could benefit all of Minnesota tourism.

As one of the owners of Bent Paddle Brewing Co. in Duluth, MN, my business has been part of one of these tourist district catalyst success stories. When we opened Bent Paddle in 2013, we did so in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of my hometown. What had once been a vibrant historical business district had turned into a series of vacant commercial buildings and empty streets over many decades of commercial business downturn in the neighborhood. As craft beer, spirits, and wine tourists in states like Colorado, Oregon, North Carolina, and California, we knew that "if you brew it, they will come," and they did! New "craft" businesses run by other like-minded young entrepreneurs started popping up around us within two years of our founding. As a group, we renamed and remarketed the district as the "Lincoln Park Craft District." The empty streets when we first opened Bent Paddle are now teeming with people year-round who are shopping, eating, and drinking (& living) and happy to have a fun, vibrant new neighborhood to visit when they come to Duluth on vacation.

I am personally on the Executive Strategy Committee of the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center (DECC) Board of Directors. This appointed seat showcases how one of Minnesota's favorite tourist destination cities sees a place for a craft beverage representative on one of its most essential tourist boards. I hope you will too! Please don't hesitate to contact me for further communication or information.



Cheers!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura S. F. Mullen". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Laura 'Salyards-Fryberger' Mullen
Co-Founder | Bent Paddle Brewing Co.