



**Testimony Submitted by Scott Brandi, President  
Ski Areas of New York, Inc.  
Joint Legislative Hearing: **Economic Development**  
February 1, 2017**

On behalf of the over 50 ski areas and 100 suppliers to the ski industry, thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony in support of the snow sports industry. Our industry not only improves New Yorkers' quality of life by promoting health and wellness through outdoor recreation and provides priceless family entertainment in the backdrop of our scenic mountains, but also helps drive New York State's economic and tourism engines.

Ski Areas of New York ("SANY"), is an independent, member-based association with a steadfast commitment to advancing and expanding our state's snow sports industry. SANY works tirelessly to develop marketing programs, create educational opportunities and enhance public awareness of the benefits of snow sports throughout the state and region to foster new and continued growth for our members.

New York has the most operating ski areas in the nation, and with nearly 4 million visits each season, our state typically ranks fourth in the number of total downhill snow sports visits. Last season, the industry's economic impact was nearly \$1 billion, employing over 13,000 people throughout the course of the year. The majority of our employees live within 25 miles of their ski areas, meaning the industry is not only responsible for the livelihood of many New York residents, but that these ski employees reinvest back into the local economy by spending their earnings in surrounding communities, many of which tend to be in rural areas and rely on the industry to survive.<sup>1</sup> When the industry succeeds, the local communities and families who depend on it succeed.

Unfortunately, our ski areas are vulnerable to unpredictable weather and global warming is a threat to our environment, the future of our industry and the livelihoods of so many New Yorkers. With 2016 marking the hottest year on record, and the third record-breaking year in a row, it's now more important than ever to continue the state's focus and investment on the snow sports and tourism industries. SANY has outlined the following budgetary priorities to help ensure our ski areas' continued growth and success so that New York remains a top-notch destination for snow sports enthusiasts.

### **Energy tax relief & equipment upgrades**

In an effort to combat the effects of climate change and stay competitive with neighboring states,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.iskiny.com/files/public/Economic\\_Impact\\_Study\\_2014-15.pdf](http://www.iskiny.com/files/public/Economic_Impact_Study_2014-15.pdf)

SANY respectfully requests the 2017-18 budget include a sales and use tax exemption for snow production and the purchase of energy-efficient snowmaking, snow grooming and ski lift equipment (S.2645).

As the result of warmer than average seasons, snowmaking is an expensive, labor intensive but necessary measure to ensure our ski areas remain in business and are equipped to serve the millions of visitors from across the state and beyond. With advancements in technology, equipment is now safer and more energy efficient, producing fewer emissions and utilizing less horsepower.

Currently, New York's three state-owned ski areas are exempt from the state sales tax, creating an unfair advantage and making it more difficult for privately owned resorts to compete. This energy tax relief would help level the playing field and allow all ski areas to take advantage of these new advancements, helping ensure that our industry remains economically viable.

In 2014, Vermont recognized the importance of its ski industry by implementing a Snow Gun Exchange Program to replace old snow guns with new, energy efficient equipment. The state spent over \$5 million replacing 2,400 snow guns, all while reducing consumption and the carbon footprint. The new machines are 80 to 90 percent more efficient and can produce more snow at higher temperatures and humidity. SANY respectfully requests the state include sufficient funding to implement a similar program in New York State which would work in conjunction with the aforementioned energy tax relief proposal.

### **Capital grant funding**

With the state's recent investment in Gore and Whiteface Mountains, it's evident that New York recognizes the importance of our industry and the dire need to upgrade aging resorts to create competitive, world-class facilities that offer year-round activities. The recently announced investment will fund the first major upgrade in 30 years at both mountains, and SANY requests that such opportunities are extended to our other ski resorts, many of which are in survival mode and in desperate need of upgrading their facilities.

By making available a pool of funding to upgrade snowmaking, night lighting, water retention and other related improvements, the state will help level the playing field and ensure that none of our ski areas are left out in the cold. This will not only increase revenue, but also create new opportunities for both resorts and local communities.

### **Helmet safety**

SANY believes that safety at ski areas is paramount, especially when it comes to our children. Mirroring the New York State Bicycle Helmet Law, we request the state budget include a measure requiring all skiers under the age of fourteen to wear securely fastened protective helmets (S.1376). As helmet usage has increased over the last decade, there has been a dramatic decline in potentially serious head injuries. In fact, helmets can reduce head injuries by 30 to 50 percent, which can be the difference between a minor and serious injury.<sup>2 3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [www.nsaa.org/media/275601/Helmet\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_9\\_1\\_16.pdf](http://www.nsaa.org/media/275601/Helmet_Fact_Sheet_9_1_16.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.lidsonkids.org/?page\\_id=100](http://www.lidsonkids.org/?page_id=100)

The proposal supported by SANY would require ski operators to have an inventory of helmets on-hand for rent and sale at facilities, along with signage increasing awareness of the new law and the availability of protective headgear. While SANY ardently supports and encourages the use of helmets by skiers of all ages, we believe this potentially life-saving measure will go a long way to ensuring the safety of our children, and even help reduce the costs associated with injuries.

### **Tourism investments**

New York State is a world-class tourist destination, drawing visitors from far and wide. In 2015, the tourism industry generated over \$102 billion in total economic impact – an all-time high – and was the state's fourth largest employer. Due to the industry's demonstrated ability to create jobs and generate revenue, SANY supports, at a minimum, the \$55 million investment to support tourism allocated in the Executive Budget Proposal. However, we also advocate for further increases for the state's I Love NY, Market NY and Matching Grants programs, as tourism is integral to the state's success and has proven to be one of the best positioned industries to provide a return on investment.

SANY also supports the executive's proposal to establish I Love NY welcome centers across the state in order to promote each region's local tourism assets. We request that ski areas in each region are highlighted at the centers to increase exposure and draw attention to the many winter recreational opportunities available in New York State.

### **The future**

The value and economic impact of snow sports on New York's economy cannot be overstated. The industry is poised to be a boon for the state, but we need a lift. On the heels of one of the worst winters in recent history, average revenue is down over 20 percent and our state's proud and storied skiing heritage is at risk of becoming a distant memory. Without aggressive assistance, New York State's number one standing in the nation may soon vanish as our ski areas could dwindle from over 50 to just 30 in a few short years.

As we combat climate change and the formidable competition we face from neighboring states, Canada and state-owned ski areas, we ask for your continued support of our industry and the residents and communities that depend on it.

Thank you for your consideration as we move forward together to grow snow sports and make New York State a great place to live, work and play.



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