

Pennsylvania Tourism & Lodging Association (PTLA)

Testimony

To The House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee

By John Delozier, Vice President--Hospitality Lodging Investors

and Member—PTLA Board of Directors

Good Morning Chairman Stern, Chairman Kirkland and members of the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about House Bill No. 137 and a post Labor Day school start. The Pennsylvania Tourism and Lodging Association supports this proposed legislation with great enthusiasm and we ask you to move this bill to the house floor for a vote.

My name is John Delozier. I am before you today representing the Pennsylvania Tourism & Lodging Association, particularly the lodging segment of our association. As you probably know, the 600 plus membership of PTLA represents lodging and tourism interests throughout the Commonwealth. Our membership consists of a cross section of these interests including, lodging members, lodging management companies, a wide variety of attractions, tourism promotion agencies, vendors to our industry, and hospitality schools.

In my current position with Pittsburgh based Hospitality Lodging Investors, I oversee three hotel properties here in the state of Pennsylvania. Over the last twenty years our company principals have developed, owned or managed hotels and restaurants in Altoona, Monroeville, Hershey, Shillington, Wyomissing, York, State College, and Gettysburg. In addition to my involvement with PTLA, I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Gettysburg Convention & Visitors Bureau and at this time serve the organization as their Immediate Past Chair.

This committee has been a strong advocate for the tourism industry in the past. I am confident that the common sense nature of this bill speaks for itself. I am going to avoid making comments on the studies that my colleague Mr. Oliver is including in his testimony to you. His numbers alone speak to the common sense nature of this bill. A post labor day school start would generate hundreds of millions of dollars for the state's economy and creates jobs. I will repeat one of Mr. Oliver's numbers; however, as I know all of you are concerned about our state's budget concerns. In one week, the last week of August, the Commonwealth loses \$17.7 million dollars in state tax revenue when school starts before Labor Day.

This morning, I will also avoid testifying about our State's Education System. I will avoid making comments that seek to direct school districts on exactly how to operate and I will leave those issues to capable school administrators. As someone who spends a considerable amount of time on the college campus at an adjunct level and as the spouse of an elementary educator, I assure you I support a strong education system that provides Pennsylvania Children with the very best education possible. My colleagues and friends I represent here today join me in that support as well. With that said, we firmly believe a quality education and a post Labor Day school start are not conflicting issues.

While I choose not to testify about the items my industry colleagues will address, and while I will refrain from testifying as an expert on education, I will testify about that which I am truly passionate—the people of the tourism and lodging industry. What does one week mean to the people represented by the PTLA?

1. At a small hotel in Gettysburg just one mile from the Gettysburg National Military Park, a housekeeper named Frankie has her hours cut from 40 hours to 16 hours for the last week of August. For Frankie, who uses the public transit and catches rides with co-workers, this is a significant loss of income. This is possibly a significant part of her rent payment or grocery money. I admit I am trying to tug on heart strings here a little bit but please hear me out. These are little numbers in the grand scheme of things. This is just one week. And granted the week after Labor Day when everyone is back in school Frankie has to learn to live on 16 hours a week and whatever other benefits she can claim until the tourism season comes back around in the spring. What we are asking for is that one additional week. One additional week where she is not drawing unemployment benefits. One additional week where she is able to get on the bus and take pride in her work. These numbers aren't as little when we realize that Frankie is just one out of 10 housekeepers at that particular property. Please understand that there is a Frankie working at a hotel in Hershey. Please understand that there is a Frankie at the Sheraton Center City in Philadelphia. The larger the hotel, the more individuals just like Frankie.
2. At that same 83 room hotel in Gettysburg there is a young General Manager named Bryan. As a lifelong resident of Gettysburg, Bryan knows one thing as absolute fact—when the kids go back to school the last week of August, things get very quiet in Gettysburg. His hotel revenues drop. In 2011, his hotel's weekly revenue performance during the last week of August was nearly half that of the preceding four weeks. In fact, this drop in revenue was equal to Frankie's yearly salary or the equivalent of one full time guest service agent's yearly salary. Again, little numbers in the grand scheme of things. This is just one week. Just

like Frankie must do at home, Bryan will tighten the proverbial belt around the hotel, and do whatever he can to operate his property efficiently until the tourism season comes back around in the spring. I ask again for that one additional week—the last week in August. You see my pattern by now. There are more managers just like Bryan here in the state. There are much larger hotels than Bryan's hotel. There is Chuck Dickinson from the Split Rock Resort & Golf Club in the Poconos. There is Tim Zugger from the Doubletree Hotel in Pittsburgh. The hoteliers of the PTLA membership ask for one more week.

3. I ask you for that one additional week on behalf of hotel owners and operators such as myself or Jim Purdum from Penn State Hospitality Services our association president. We have the ability to create additional jobs, additional tax revenue for the state and our owners have the ability to develop new hotel supply throughout the Commonwealth. This additional week of revenue only helps us with these endeavors. And as the small numbers I mention are multiplied throughout the state the very large numbers Mr. Oliver mentions are reality.
4. As the members of this committee are well aware, our local tourism promotion agencies have lost significant state funding in recent years. Give our lodging properties one more week to generate local tax revenues for these organizations before the tourism season ends each year. I can assure you the Gettysburg Convention and Visitor's Bureau would put such tax use to good use promoting our destination and encouraging tourism spending here in the Commonwealth.
5. Lastly, I would be remiss not to mention our member attractions. Our members such as Kennywood in Allegheny County, DelGrossos in Blair County or the world famous HersheyPark. These members are particularly hard hit by a pre Labor Day School start as they employ younger workers as well as teachers and other school employees during the summer season. These members also join me in asking you for this one extra week. A post Labor Day school start allows these businesses to retain valuable employees and operate their businesses at full capacity during what could be a very profitable week.

Again, I know that this committee is a great advocate for our industry and for our PTLA membership. Thank you for letting me share my reflections on this proposed legislation and how it impacts individuals as well as businesses and our Commonwealth. Thank you for your work on this common sense proposal and for moving this item to the House floor.

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