

# **Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau**

## **Testimony**

### **To The House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee**

By John Oliver, President/CEO Visit Erie

and Chairman, PACVB Government Affairs Committee

Good morning Chairman Stern, Chairman Kirkland and members of the House Tourism and Recreational Committee.

I am John Oliver, the current Chair of the Government Affairs Committee of the Pennsylvania Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau. My day job is as the President/CEO of VisitErie. I am appreciative of the opportunity to speak to you today with regards to HB137 which deals with the Post Labor Day School Start Initiative. Let me start by stating that PACVB is strongly in favor of this legislation. Let me also state that PACVB and the entire tourism industry strongly believes in the need to provide a quality education to our children in Pennsylvania. We believe that a Post Labor Day School start and a quality education are not mutually exclusive.

There have been a number of issues and questions that have been raised by this proposed legislation that I would like to offer our opinion.

1. Will later school opening dates affect student education?

- The bill does not affect the 180-day minimum educational requirement. Several schools in the state open after Labor Day already and have no trouble maintaining a high quality of education and still ending the school year in early June.

2. Should the state be mandating a specific statewide opening date?

- School boards will still have the authority to set their opening date, as long as it is not earlier than the day after Labor Day.
- The school code already has some school opening restrictions in law. Schools can't operate on Sundays and certain specified holidays—Memorial Day, July 4th, Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year's Day and up to 5 local holidays. The precedent for this is in the law.

### 3. Is there an economic impact from starting school before Labor Day?

Five years ago the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee contracted with TrippUmbach, a Pittsburgh-based economic research firm to conduct a study with the following findings.

- \$378 million would be added to Pennsylvania's economy if all schools began after Labor Day. This estimate is based on \$164 million in direct dollars that would be spent by families traveling during the week prior to Labor Day as well as the "re-spending" of these dollars throughout the state's economy.
- School beginning before Labor Day costs the state 2,348 jobs annually. TrippUmbach's analysis indicates that adding \$378 million in net revenue to the state's economy would create the equivalent of more than 2,300 new jobs
- The Commonwealth loses \$17.7 million in state tax revenue as a result of school starting before Labor Day. This figure is based only on travel and tourism losses resulting from families not taking vacations during the last week of August; it does not include several million additional dollars in uncollected hotel room taxes.
- The inability to work summer jobs during the last week of August costs teachers and students about \$45.6 million. These earnings, in turn, would generate about \$3.7 million in additional state taxes and about \$8.6 million in local tax revenue.
- Expanding the school day by 8 minutes would save \$105.4 million annually. If the school day was lengthened by 8 minutes, it would be the time equivalent of 3 instructional days. These extra "days" could then be used to offset 3 of the instructional days lost due to school starting after Labor Day.
- Each vacation added to the school calendar costs parents an additional \$4.6 million in child care expense.

### 4. Is there a social impact from starting before Labor Day?

- Many families complain that opening school before the traditional end-of-summer holiday negatively affects family vacations. There have been reports of substantial absenteeism in some schools that start early, due to scheduled family activities and vacations on the week before the holiday.

- Ending the summer vacation earlier and then having more non-holiday days off throughout the school year also forces parents to take off work or find child care for those days off, which may not be holidays in their workplace.
- Jobs are affected. Students who work to get money for college or living expenses have to go back before summer is over and miss out on that pay. Some students are financially disadvantaged by early school opening since they may not have access to those jobs in which they have to commit to working through the Labor Day weekend, or they may not be able to get any bonuses available for working through the holiday weekend.
- Businesses in the community that employ younger workers, such as the tourism and hospitality industries, also suffer from early school openings since they lose these workers during what should be one of their busiest weeks of the summer. As an example Waldameer Park and Water World in Erie now closes the week before Labor Day due to manpower shortages and a decline in visitation.
- A recent statewide survey showed that 55% of Pennsylvanians were in favor of a Post Labor Day school start. That is up from the 47% in favor in a 2006 survey.

5. Would Pennsylvania be the only state with this law?

- Virginia, Minnesota, Texas and Michigan have a law on the books already. Wisconsin and North Carolina have a September 1 minimum.

In closing, I would urge you to move HB137 to the floor of the House to be voted on.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today.