

The Pennsylvania Golf Course
Owners Association
www.golfinpa.com

**Testimony of
Charlie Groff, Chair of the Government Affairs Committee
Pennsylvania Golf Course Owners Association
Presented before the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee
December 8, 2011**

Chairman Stern, Chairman Kirkland and Members of the Committee:

Good Morning. My name is Charlie Groff and I am the owner of Groff's Farm Golf Club (www.groffsfarmgolfclub.com), a public, daily-fee golf course located in Mount Joy, Lancaster County. I am also the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee of the Pennsylvania Golf Course Owners Association (PGO). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to voice the PGO's strong support for House Bill 137 which would require school districts, under most circumstances, to begin their school year no earlier than the day after Labor Day. We have testified on this issue in past years and again commend Rep. Godshall for introducing the legislation and applaud the Committee for holding this public hearing.

There are roughly 800 public and private golf course and practice facilities in Pennsylvania. The PGO (www.golfinpa.com) represents public daily fee and private courses as well as resort venues and practice facilities such as driving ranges. From family-owned businesses where parents first teach their children the game to the past and future host of the United States Open, the members of the PGO reflect the full range of facilities that make up the golf industry in Pennsylvania.

PGO courses are also dependable contributors to the local economies where they are located. The Pennsylvania golf industry is responsible for tens of thousands of jobs statewide and helps neighboring businesses generate millions of dollars in off-course sales. As an amenity often sought by companies looking to locate their facilities, golf courses provide area economic development agencies with an important tool in their efforts to attract and retain top businesses. In addition, golf courses – and the open space they provide – are a tremendous environmental resource. While the boundaries of some courses blend quickly into rolling farmland, others represent the only substantial green space in areas of heavy and continuing development.

When it comes to Pennsylvania tourism, PGO members are a key reason why thousands make the Commonwealth their family vacation destination each year. Most, if not all, of Pennsylvania's visitor and convention bureau websites – including the Commonwealth's own www.visitpa.com – contain links to our member courses. It's easy to understand why golf has the real potential to enhance a visitor's experience, length of stay and overall spending.

Before I share our reasons for backing HB 137, I would like to note that the PGO recognizes the important responsibility school districts have in educating our children, and we

appreciate the scheduling challenges they face. We do not support reducing the number of school days. However, our view is that there is ample time between Labor Day and late May/early June to complete the school calendar as required by state law. Doing so will benefit Pennsylvania tourism – and all the industries related to it – that generate substantial tax revenues that help fund education in the Commonwealth.

As with other tourism interests that support the passage of House Bill 137, the PGO believes this legislation is vitally important to the golf and tourism industries for two reasons. First, it will enable Pennsylvania families to continue their recreational travel until the beginning of September. And second, a post-Labor Day start will allow young people who not only enjoy their summer employment opportunities, but also play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of golf courses and other venues to remain in place until the traditional end of the summer season.

Unlike other states who are home to a large number of golf-related businesses such as product manufacturing or professional service companies, almost 90 percent of the revenues generated in Pennsylvania's golf industry come directly from rounds played or time spent at a stand-alone practice facility. With roughly 15 percent of Pennsylvania's golf population being between the ages of 5 and 19, and another 45 percent being their parents' age, the widely-held practice of starting school in early August has had a tremendously negative impact on course revenues. We estimate that moving the start date of the school year until after Labor Day will result in tens of thousands of more rounds at Pennsylvania courses, generating millions of dollars in additional revenues.

Those additional rounds of golf play will continue to rise if courses are able to retain their summer help through the end of the season. PGO member courses employ thousands of seasonal employees throughout Pennsylvania who are vitally important to the long-term success and stability of those courses that hire them. From providing top-notch service in our restaurants to maintaining the most important aspects of our facilities, the young people who enjoy summer employment with golf courses gain valuable work experience and play a major role in our overall success. Giving them those extra weeks at the end of the summer will be a win-win for everyone – making sure our courses remain valuable tourism attractions in all regions of the Commonwealth.

While some may view golf simply as an activity for the well-to-do, the fact is that most PGO facilities are small businesses not unlike the other companies that make up a community's local economy. Beyond their local impact, these small businesses are a vital component of the multi-billion dollar tourism industry in this Commonwealth. Enacting the provisions of HB 137 is an important step to make sure the golf industry remains a vibrant part of Pennsylvania's multifaceted tourism economy and it will put us on equal footing with other golf-rich states such as Michigan and Virginia that already require schools to start after Labor Day.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Pennsylvania Golf Course Owners Association, I want to thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this critically important legislation. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.