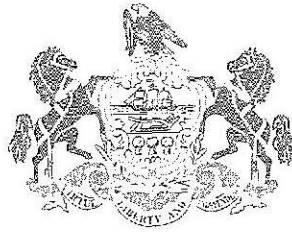


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House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

COMMITTEES

CONSUMER AFFAIRS, CHAIRMAN
INSURANCE
LEGISLATIVE BUDGET & FINANCE

December 7, 2011

Chairman Jerry Stern
House Tourism & Recreational Development Committee
Room 315-A Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Stern:

House Bill 137 requires school districts to open no earlier than the day after Labor Day. Right now there is no starting date in the School Code, which is up to school boards.

The bill does not affect the 180-day minimum educational requirement. As a former school director myself, I know that the education of Pennsylvania students is still paramount and will not be compromised by this requirement. Many schools in the state already open after Labor Day and have no trouble achieving the 180-day requirement or maintaining a high quality of education while still ending the school year in early June.

What we're seeing is that schools are starting earlier in the year but adding extra vacation days and teacher in-service days throughout the calendar. For many families with young children, parents are forced to take off work or find child care for these extra days off, which may not be holidays in their workplace.

While the 180-day education requirement hasn't changed, more and more schools are extending their overall calendars by starting earlier. According to a national survey, in 1988, 51 percent of schools opened before September 1. By 2001 that figure increased to 75 percent. In Pennsylvania, 83 percent of schools opened before Labor Day in 2006, but 89 percent did in 2009.

The public is supportive of a post-Labor-Day start. A survey of 1,102 Pennsylvania adults was conducted by Mansfield University in early 2006. Forty-seven percent of people said they favor a law, 26 percent were opposed, 23 percent said it didn't matter and 4 percent weren't sure. So, of the people who expressed an opinion either yes or no, 64 percent favored a later school opening.

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Starting school before the holiday also has a social impact on families. August is an ideal time for summer vacation, and the Labor Day weekend in particular is the among biggest family vacation events of the year. Vacations are important because they bring families together for social, recreational and educational interaction. And in this time of two-wage-earner households, families need more opportunities to relax and be together, not fewer.


Student jobs are affected as well. Students who work to get money for college or for living expenses have to go back before the traditional summer is fully over and miss out on that pay. Some students 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 the holiday weekend.

Businesses in the community that employ younger workers, such as the tourism and hospitality industries, also suffer from early school opening, since they lose these workers during what normally is one of their busiest weeks of the summer. The committee heard testimony that Kennywood would limit their park hours during the week prior to Labor Day and close another park completely because of staff availability. Tourism industries provide employment for thousands of young people, giving many of them their first exposure to the working world. I think school districts should recognize this practical educational experience and realize that they can help it without any impact on their mandate to provide a quality education.

Finally, there is the economic impact. A study released in 2006, by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee showed that starting school before Labor Day has a \$378 million negative economic impact on the state, including the loss of \$164 million in direct dollars. It also costs 2,348 jobs and \$17.7 million in tax revenue for the state. Teachers and students lose \$45.6 million from their inability to work a summer job during that last week of August. And parents incur \$4.6 million in child care expenses for every vacation day added to the school calendar.

In closing, school districts should keep in mind that they are members of the community as well, and that what they do has an impact on every other member of the community. Starting school after Labor Day will not affect how schools achieve the 180-day educational requirement but it will greatly benefit families, students, and businesses in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Godshall, Chairman
Consumer Affairs Committee