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IN SUPPORT of SB 34
Before the Senate Education Committee
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Chairman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share some intriguing new research on how Ohio voters feel about school start dates in Ohio.

We've heard testimony that more time together in the summer is good for families. We've also heard that a later school start is good for the Ohio economy, as we have demonstrated how a more unified and later school start boosts travel-related expenditures and feeds small businesses, tax coffers and families through job retention for a longer period of time.

This bill also supports workforce development. Many Ohio farms, hotels, restaurants, attractions, shops and transportation services depend on having an adequate workforce. With workers returning to school earlier and earlier, businesses are cutting hours and shortening operating seasons due to lack of employees.

But never in this discussion have we reached out to Ohioans to tell us what they think about the issue.

The Ohio Travel Association worked with Public Opinion Strategies, led by Neil Newhouse, on a statewide survey of 800 registered Ohio voters in September. Before you is a summary of the key findings and methodology.

Ohio voters want a longer summer break instead of a broken up school year. What was most remarkable about this survey is that this support cuts across partisan, geographic and demographic lines. Researchers told us it's rare to have an issue with such overwhelming and broad support. Fifty-nine percent of Ohio voters prefer a school start date after Labor Day and 12% prefer school starting the fourth week of August. That's 71% of voters who are saying school shouldn't start before the end of August.

When asked specifically about their support of SB 34, 66% of Ohioans were in favor. Teachers and parents agreed, with 65% of teachers supporting the bill and 61% of parents.

We also gave Ohioans an opportunity to tell us why they felt strongly about this issue, and the transcribed comments filled nearly 100 pages.

Voters explained their support for the proposal quite passionately. I'll share some of the top findings now:

- One of the most important reasons why Ohioans prefer a later start date is that August heat makes it difficult for kids to learn. We heard this repeatedly. In fact 71% of voters agreed that forcing students to learn when temperatures are in the '90s is an impediment to learning.
- Ohioans want greater uniformity in school start dates across the state. We heard statements of how when one school starts in early August and another in September it creates hardships for extended and divided families to plan time together, and that it's also confusing for both drivers and truancy officers.
- Ohioans told us that when their students start school early, many aren't able to secure the best summer jobs and internships over the summer, or they have to quit their jobs early. Either way they aren't able to make as much money to pay for education or to help with family expenses
- Voters also told us that a later and more unified start date would make it easier for families to spend more time together. Not every voter has the luxury of scheduling their vacation time early in the summer and family commitments keep folks busy in June and into July. They told us that by the time they can take time off to spend time with their children or grandchildren, the kids are headed back to school.
- Another strong message we heard is that a later start will save schools utility costs. This made sense, as 32% of voters identified insufficient school funding as the most important problem facing K-12 public schools over quality of education, curriculum, testing and accountability. Voters are concerned about making sure our schools are funded properly and are using their resources wisely.
- And although there are more reasons why Ohio voters think this is a good idea, another which rose to the top was the opportunity for teachers to pursue advanced degrees and additional training in the summer.

Opponents argue that this is an issue that should be decided at the local level; however, 93% of Ohio voters say they've never been asked their opinion on when the school year should begin, indicating this is less of a local control issue and more of a school board control issue. In fact, 71% of teachers also said they'd never been asked their preference for a start date.

Ohio voters, including teachers and parents, want a school start date after Labor Day. They say it's good for their students, their families and for Ohio.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration. I'm happy to respond to any questions.