Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Christine Hensley. I have been teaching for close to 20 years in the Midview Local School District in Grafton, Ohio in Lorain County. Almost all of those years have been in the sixth grade. I am a wife to Jeff Hensley, a general contractor and small business owner and a mother to Samantha—11, and James—9, who are also students in the Midview District.

I am very excited to be here to support the bill to have schools start after Labor Day. There are many reasons why I, and many of my friends and colleagues support it as well. The first reason why I support this bill is because of the Lorain County Fair. The Fair is very near and dear to my heart and important to many others in our area. I started 4-H in third grade and now both of my children are in 4-H. With school starting earlier and earlier every year, it has really made it hard to participate in all of the activities that go on during the week. As a teacher, I am going back during the Fair for our in-service days and have to miss some of my children’s events. There are other students in our club whose schools have already started, and they have to miss the first few days of school because they are showing their animals or projects.

Over the last three years, 4-H enrollment has dropped by 260 children. That may not seem like a large number, but when you start with just under 2,300, that is significant. I’m sure the early start of school is a contributing factor to this decline in enrollment.

The other reason that I like about having time after the Fair before school starts is that it gives us time to clean up after the Fair. You don’t really notice the dirt and smell while you’re there with your animals. It’s not until you get home and it’s all in your laundry room and garage that you realize how much mud and odor was brought home. The extra time not only allows us to clean up, but also to rest and recuperate and be fresh and ready for school when it starts.

We choose to participate in the Fair and we’re not complaining. We’re just asking for the time to have a quality experience. I hear so many say that, “Oh, it’s just the Fair.” It’s not just the Fair! It’s a way of life for many of our 4-H participants and their families. Let’s not belittle their experience and participation. Just because it doesn’t happen during the school year doesn’t mean it’s not educational and worthwhile. Some of the best lessons of life are taught outside of a classroom setting.

Another reason this bill makes sense it because of the heat. I work in an air-conditioned building now, but it wasn’t always like that. Before we moved to our new buildings, my classroom on the south side of the building would become so hot that the students would beg for us to have class in the hallway. The tile floors and brick walls were so cool, and the hallway was noticeably cooler by as much as 20 degrees sometimes.

Our current high school is not air-conditioned. The students that I know there and the parents of the students have told me that their teens come home feeling physically ill from being so hot all day. It’s truly the beginning of heat exhaustion that could lead to heat stroke. I am surprised more kids aren’t sent home due to the heat being so uncomfortably high. A teacher I know that works in one of the older buildings in Cleveland had an indoor thermometer reading of 115 degrees in her classroom this past August. These old buildings hold the heat and just don’t cool down.

It’s also difficult for the teachers to dress professionally and maintain that same professionalism all day when you can’t focus in the heat. I know when I was in an old, hot building, the educational process would come to a screeching halt at some point in the day because the students and I just couldn’t function anymore.

Another reason that I support this bill is because it allows for that last hurrah of summer. Many people I know—teachers and students—are ardent campers. The long weekends like Labor Day are the ones campers love to take advantage of. When school has already started with all the homework, forms and school shopping that go with it, it makes it near impossible to truly get away and relax. This is also true for anyone who wants to get away to anywhere and try to hold on to those last few hours of what we consider to be true summer.

Labor Day is considered the official end of summer. I know I’m in a different mindset after Labor Day than before. I’m sure this is true for many others. I know as a teacher, having to stop for the holiday can make it hard to get into the true routine of the school week. I also imagine that postponing the starting date until after Labor Day would have a positive effect on tourism and consumerism here in our state. Other states that have passed this law could probably offer some positive statistics.

Lastly, the reason I am most for this bill is because of family time. My family time is precious. I want every last minute I can get. With school starting before Labor Day and during Fair, we are in constant run and prepare mode for most of August. When we aren’t preparing our projects for Fair and going to the different judging events, we’re running around making sure we’re prepared for school. This doesn’t make for relaxing quality time.

I am a teacher that tries not to give homework. I know kids need the math and reading remediation that homework offers, but I don’t bog them down with extra science tasks that can be completed in class. I don’t assign regular homework to be the cool teacher, but because I want my students to be kids. There is great benefit to riding bikes, playing with friends, getting dirty, throwing the ball around in the back yard, and running with your dog. There is precious little time to do these things with my own children during the school year. I’m not going to rob families of this as well. Now children and families are being robbed of more and more time to be kids every summer as the start date keeps creeping up earlier and earlier. School is ever so much more stressful for today’s children than it ever was for us. Give them the time to be kids.

I ask you to consider my opinions when making your final decision. Give families and their children this time. It’s precious little to ask for when you consider all of the responsibilities and tasks that distract us from the short amount of time we have with our children before they grow up. Before we know it, our children will be grown up, out of the house and on their own, and then there won’t be any more summer vacations to look forward to and take advantage of.

Thank you again for your time and allowing me to speak before this committee.