

Cedar Fair, L.P.

Proponent Testimony on SB 34

April 25, 2017

Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 34.

I am Lee Alexakos, Vice President of Community Relations and here on behalf of Cedar Fair. We operate 11 parks across the country and importantly, Cedar Point and Kings Island, here in Ohio. Cedar Fair is the largest seasonal employer in Ohio with 8,000 seasonal employees and also employs 500 full time employees. Our seasonal employees gain valuable work experience including operations, management, interpersonal skills and conflict resolution. These skills are first steps in their workforce development and provide them with valuable lessons they can use all through their careers. This legislation would allow for more real life work experience to better prepare our Ohio workforce. Studies show that students who work during high school summer months will later in life have higher hourly wages, better annual earnings, and are more consistently employed.

Cedar Fair parks help create a positive brand image for the State of Ohio and we draw millions of guests annually. Cedar Point is the roller coaster capital of the world and for 16 years was voted the “Best Amusement Park in the World”. Kings Island has been voted “Best Kids Area in the World” for over 12 consecutive years.

SB 34 would require public schools and chartered nonpublic schools to open after Labor Day. It is important to note that local control is maintained as the school district board or governing body may adopt a resolution permitting a school to open prior to Labor Day. The legislation specifically excludes year-round schools, summer school programs, and preparation activities for teachers and administrators from the requirement to start after Labor Day.

Visits to our parks are a key component of the Ohio tourism industry. Tourism is a major economic driver for the state and as a whole is a \$42 billion industry. Tourism is the third largest industry in the state and generates about \$2.7 billion in total state and local taxes. It is estimated that moving to a post Labor Day school year would generate an additional \$200 million in economic activity for the State of Ohio.

We understand that there are several factors involved when considering an item of legislation such as SB 34. Many tourism-driven businesses earn operating income over a limited period of time with July and August being peak months. However, as the school start date creeps earlier and earlier in August, the summer travel season is shortened. The loss of a few weeks can cause significant hardship on tourism-driven business like Cedar Fair and even more damaging on smaller tourism businesses in Ohio.

Another important aspect that should be considered is the opportunity for families to spend more time together. SB 34 would help Ohio families preserve precious family time and real life experiences in an ever increasing over-scheduled world. The additional vacation time

afforded to families by SB 34 also helps promote economic activity and increases state and local tax revenues.

A post Labor Day school start time is not a new idea across the country. Several other states have enacted similar items of legislation. One state we'd like to highlight in particular is Michigan due its proximity to Ohio (Detroit is less than two hours away from Cedar Point) and the impact of a post Labor Day school start date has had on the state. Michigan enacted its law in 2005 and began a post Labor Day school start date in 2006. It is worth noting, that a recent poll shows that 74 percent of Michigan voters approve of the law requiring public schools to open after Labor Day. After Michigan moved to a post Labor Day school year the following occurred:

- 53 percent of Michigan Hotels saw higher booking and occupancy during the last two weeks in August.
- Michigan's Adventure had a 23,000 person spike in attendance in the last two weeks in August.
- Great Wolf Lodge in Traverse City saw a booking rate increase of over 100 reservations.
- Detroit's Henry Ford Museum saw a 26,000 person increase in the two weeks prior to Labor Day.

Thank you, Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee for the opportunity to present this proponent testimony. SB 34 levels the playing field and potentially eliminates the status quo that disadvantages Ohio in comparison the state up North. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have for me at this time.