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Executive Director, MTC

February 19, 2020

**RE: HB 743 Universal School Start Act of 2020 - House Ways & Means**

**Position: Support**

Thank you, committee members for the opportunity to testify today in favor of HB0743 that would streamline and standardize Maryland's educational calendar across all 24 of our state's jurisdictions.

I'm testifying on behalf of myself, a small business owner in Baltimore, and as a board member of the Maryland Tourism Coalition, representing an industry that supports over 140,000 Maryland jobs and generates billions of dollars in tax revenue for the state every year.

A recent analysis by the Business Economic and Community Outreach Network at Salisbury University concluded that the simple act of requiring all schools to begin classes after Labor Day can generate up to \$115 million worth of economic activity representing increased spending at tourist destinations and added summer employment for students. Not only will that additional activity benefit hundreds of small business owners and their employees, the resulting tax revenue can be directed by this body and the administration to fund other important priorities, including education.

Our members include hundreds of parents of children enrolled in Maryland public schools. We believe education should be among our highest priorities. Our members work hand in hand with teachers to develop curricula that include hands-on learning experiences at little or no cost to families. These include field trips to important cultural and historic sites, scientific attractions, and beautiful outdoor spaces. We believe tourism is education. If we thought for a minute that this policy would have an adverse effect on the educational outcomes of our students, we would not support it. However, there is no evidence to support that claim.

What happened in Maryland after Governor Hogan's executive order was implemented several years ago? The comptroller's office reported increased tax revenue in tourism sectors during the final week of summer. The Maryland State Fair reported some of its best numbers ever. And thousands of families had additional opportunities to make lasting Maryland memories together. At the same time, test scores did not fall. Students didn't stop learning. All Maryland schools were able to meet the mandated 180 day requirement without exception.

I'd also point out that one of Maryland's greatest assets is its accessibility. Marylanders travel freely and regularly across county lines for work, vacation, and recreation. Teachers who work in Baltimore County live in Baltimore City. Families who live in Howard County send their children to summer camp in Garrett County. High school students who attend school in Wicomico County spend summers working at the beach in Worcester County. Inconsistent school start dates from county to county make it extremely challenging for these many hundreds of Marylanders to plan their summer activities, work schedules, and childcare. Standardizing the school start date statewide is a pragmatic, common-sense solution to this problem.

Which brings me to my final point. We support this policy because Marylanders support this policy. Polling has indicated that 60%-70% of Marylanders want to see post-Labor Day school statewide. In these highly polarized times, that's as close to a consensus as anyone can hope for. So today I urge you to listen to the voices of our citizens, enable increased economic activity and tax revenue, and let summer be summer!

Sincerely,

*Chris Riehl*

Owner, Baltimore Rent-a-Tour, Maryland Tourism Coalition 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair