Good afternoon Committee Chairmen, Sen. McCrory and Rep. Sanchez, Ranking members Sen. Berthel and Rep. McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Stan Mickus and I am the Director of Public Affairs for Cross Sound Ferry Services and the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut’s Legislative Committee. I am submitting this testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 7258 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRM GRADUATION DATE AND THE DATE FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL.

The Chamber of Commerce, our members and regional tourism businesses have long wrestled with the issue of the school year start date, namely the challenges of beginning the school year prior to the Labor Day holiday weekend. There is a growing coalition of support among parents and others for pushing the school year start date to after the Labor Day holiday weekend. Some districts have gone back to this traditional school start date, while others continue to begin the school prior to Labor Day weekend. We advocate for this initiative for the following reasons:

1. **Drain on the seasonal workforce.** High school aged students that seek seasonal employment to help in family expenses are directly impacted, as the early school start date deprives them of income they would have earned should the school year start after Labor Day. This also directly impacts seasonal businesses that are tourism related, as they lose entry level and seasonal employees during the end of summer and ultimately for the Labor Day holiday weekend.

2. **Public Safety.** Climate change has resulted in June being less summer-like and the end of summer being warmer than ever before. With the early school start date, many students are going back to school in unseasonably warm conditions. The start of the 2018-19 school year underscored this trend as many schools were forced into early dismissal or cancellations altogether during the last week in August of 2018 due to the extreme heat. This resulted in many parents scrambling to find childcare while they were at work as schools were dismissed or cancelled.
3. **Honoring the traditional end of the tourist and summer season.** Beginning the school year prior to Labor Day is extremely impactful for businesses engaged in the tourism trade, particularly seasonal businesses. The early end of summer equates to less visitors and ultimately impacts the Labor Day weekend as parents are already in the “back to school” mindset and thus are more reluctant to travel on the holiday weekend. Many of these businesses are privately-owned and either “make it or break it” over the three-month summer season while families are traveling with their children.

4. **Quality of Life.** Parents traditionally relish the last few days of summer with their children. With a post Labor Day start date, parents can plan that last getaway or day trips during the last week in August when the weather is ripe for such outings. Starting the school year before Labor Day typically results in an early June dismissal. An early end to the school year is particularly challenging, as most summer camps haven’t started yet. Parents are then forced to once again seek childcare to bridge the gap to camps, which becomes costly and burdensome for dual-working families. A post Labor Day school start date addresses this issue directly.

Other states have either mandated (Virginia, Maryland) or have regulations (New York) that require a post Labor Day start date to the school year for students. Some districts in Connecticut have put it to a vote of parents, while others have been successfully beginning the school year after Labor Day for years to the delight of parents, educators and administrators. We feel it is time for Connecticut to take such action.