

## **The Roanoke Times**

### **Va. Senate panel protects post-Labor Day school law**

RICHMOND – To the relief of tourist destinations like Virginia Beach, state law specifying a post-Labor Day start to the school year appears safe for another year.

The Senate Education and Health Committee Thursday rejected two House of Delegates bills that would have allowed school divisions to determine when the school calendar can commence.

Existing law specifies that school divisions must start the instructional year after Labor Day, though localities can receive waivers.

Thursday, the Senate committee spiked two bills – HB 1319 and HB 1467 – to give school divisions more say in when they welcome back students from summer break.

Del. Don Merricks, R-Pittsylvania County, offered HB 1319 to allow exempt the cities of Danville and Martinsville as well as Pittsylvania and Henry counties from the Labor Day rule.

Sen. Steve Newman, R-Lynchburg, reminded Merricks that despite the failure of his bill the Senate budget included language to renew for another year state Labor Day waivers granted to local school divisions.

This year, 78 of Virginia's 132 school divisions have waivers to open schools before Labor Day, according to the state Department of Education.

Legislation proposed by Del. Thomas "Tag" Greason, R-Loudoun County, was more expansive – his HB 1467 would have given school divisions across the state freedom to set their own start dates.

Both were defeated in the committee which recently killed SB 1099 from Sen. Ralph Smith, R-Bedford County, to strike the Labor Day language from the law.

Todd Jackson, February 14, 2013

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