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Franchot gains O'Malley's support on school start

By Michael Dresser, The Baltimore Sun

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Comptroller Peter Franchot's campaign to push back the start of the public school year until after Labor Day picked up the cautious support of Gov. Martin O'Malley Wednesday.

After Franchot opened a meeting of the Board of Public Works by laying out the case for an extended summer vacation, O'Malley said he hopes a task force studying the proposal support the idea.

"I'm for that. Hopefully the task force will come out our way," said O'Malley, who generally doesn't show much enthusiasm for the comptroller's ideas.

Franchot has argued that a longer summer season would give a boost to business and tax revenues in Maryland's tourist areas -- especially Ocean City and Deep Creek Lake.

O'Malley's backing might not make much of a difference for advocates of a September start, however. Takirra Winfield, a spokeswoman for the governor, said O'Malley wants to wait to act until the task force submits its conclusions. She said that report is due next summer -- too late for the General Assembly to take action in O'Malley's last legislative session as governor before term limits force him from office.

Nevertheless, the governor is inclined to be supportive, Winfield said.

"He realizes that the tourism industry is important to the economy," she said.

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