

June 1, 2021

Senator Rob Wagner  
Chair, Senate Rules Committee

RE: Oppose SB 857

Senator Wagner and members of the Senate Rules Committee,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the river community.

My name is Paige Stoyer. I'm a mom, a proud member of Environment Oregon, I used to work for GreenPeace, and I'm a boater and paddler. But I am submitting testimony as a co-founder of the Willamette River Community Coalition which works to bring people in different activities together to collaborate on reducing user conflict. Our efforts include organizing volunteer groups to help with the Dragon Boat festival, creating safety videos for motorized and non-motorized users, and sharing information with other river users about boating regulations and how to properly share the river.

Our coalition is composed of boaters, paddlers, rowers, kayakers, riverfront homeowners, and floating homeowners. We oppose SB 857 and these attempts to restrict motorized boats users and towed sports. Rather than divide our community with this bill and others like it, we believe we should bring the river community together to increase education, safety, and respect for each other on the water.

I am deeply concerned about the lack of science and the misleading claims that continue to be made around these issues. This same bill died in the House, in part, because its proponents refuse to conduct scientific studies and look at the facts of their claims. Reports previously submitted for the record from 2019 have had several key lines removed including portions that clearly stated that long term studies were needed and that "The intensity of the erosion produced by boat wakes can be considered as very small." Dr. Pedro Lomonaco of Oregon State University, author of this study, admitted during a House hearing earlier in

the legislative session that those facts are still very true, but were removed from his revised 2021 study.

Those reports also stated that long-term studies would need to be done because of the many causes of year-round erosion: “A long-term, monitoring program (minimum of 1 year) would provide information on the magnitude of the different agents affecting the morphological evolution of the river margins.” ORSPA submitted a letter from Dr. Stan Gregory of Oregon State University from 2019 where he ends by saying, “Greater attention to this issue and studies to better inform decisions are needed to protect these important resources for the people of Oregon.”

I and many others have repeatedly reached out to those leading these boating bans, The Calm Water Coalition, and its members including ORSPA. Unfortunately, they have not been willing to work collaboratively with the broader river community. It's extremely disappointing that we have offered countless times to a variety of interested parties who support this bill to have a frank policy discussion and have instead been rejected and shut out of the process.

Safety experts have testified on numerous occasions about how there is no data to suggest towed sports are a safety issue, and that shutting down sections of the river to boaters just pushes them into other areas, creating safety issues for other users. If this bill passes, and boaters are kicked off the Upper Willamette, there will be dangerous crowding as a result in the Lower Willamette, Hagg Lake, Detroit Lake, and other areas. This is especially concerning, as the Marine Board has stated there is a huge increase in novice paddlers going out unprepared which has led to an increase in accidents and injuries on the water.

On top of the base bill, which would effectively ban wake boating in the Newberg Pool, Sen. Kennemer and Rep. Witt have pushed for an amendment to extend and redefine the Newberg Pool and restrict even more types of boat recreation.

The river is for everyone. The committee heard from Heather Asa, whose son was disabled in a car accident and started an adaptive wake surf program to take out people on the river, including disabled veterans. She has testified previously that “Closing down the river more would devastate the ADA community that is already limited on boating accessibility. People we take out look forward to our

events for a day of putting their regular lives aside to enjoy what the water has to offer. For some it is life changing!”

We hope that the legislature and other elected officials will help us pursue fair and fact-based policies and reject SB 857. Thank you.

Paige Stoyer

Co-Founder, Willamette River Community Coalition