

Submitter: Kristi Whildin
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure: HB3006

To: House Committee on Judiciary RE:HB3006

From: Parent of a youth rower

I want to offer testimony on HB3006 with the goal to request an exemption for youth rowers that participate in rowing clubs.

There are a number of local rowing clubs that operate in Oregon with the purpose of teaching youth the sport of sculling or sweeping. Without an exemption for rowers, this bill will destroy the ability to train youth in this sport safely and effectively. Requiring rowers to wear a PFD will put them at greater risk than they are without them.

According to current federal coast guard regulations, rowers are exempted nationwide from wearing PFD's while rowing specifically due to the nature of the sport.

*Rowing involves moving parts including a sliding seat and oars repeatedly brought in close contact with the torso. Our rowers wear tight fitting leggings and tops without pockets to prevent getting caught on moving pieces. A bulky PFD with straps and clasps will be more likely to catch on these parts increasing the chances of an accident or extraction from the shell.

* In the event of a capsize, which is extremely rare, rowing shells are designed with features that allow athletes to free themselves of the boat. Our rowers specifically wear rowing gear that facilitates this release. Adding a PFD greatly increases the chances of getting caught in the mechanics of the boat itself.

*The bulkiness of PFDs prohibits the rowing motion. Forcing our teens to wear these while training will effectively prohibit them from rowing correctly and effectively eliminate all chance of our rowers being competitive in the sport on a regional or national level.

*Our organized rowing programs in Oregon are run with safety launches containing lifejackets for athletes and coaches who's sole job is to watch the rowers. Our teens are not on the water unsupervised and the safety record of our state's youth programs is excellent. In addition, our children must pass a mandatory survival swim test before joining these programs.

My daughter joined Oregon Rowing Unlimited when she was 12 years old. At 16 years of age, she is ranked 3rd in the nation in the U17 women's single. Her quad is currently ranked 1st in the nation. She and her team mates are winning races because of the training and supervision these rowing programs provide and she has never capsized.

Until very recently, Oregon was not considered a state that produced competitive rowers. Altering the Coast Guard's exemption and forcing our youth rowers to wear PFDs while training will destroy their ability to compete. It is forcing a handicap on our children in a state where rowing is already severely behind competitively. My daughter would not be offered scholarships to college if she had been forced to wear a life jacket when she joined ORU.

I support your initiatives to increase water safety but do not agree that mandating PFD's for rowers will create a safer experience please consider the an exemption for our rowers in alignment with the US Coast Guard.

Thank you,
Kristi Whildin