

Submitter: dave brunkow  
On Behalf Of: Oregon Rowing Unlimited  
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: HB3006

Dear Legislators

I understand that there will be a hearing soon reviewing a bill to raise the age for mandatory wearing of PFDs in children from 12 years to 16 years. My daughter has rowed for two years at the junior program at Oregon Rowing Unlimited on the Willamette River. While I appreciate that the intent of the bill is to increase water safety for children, I believe it may best be applied to motorized boats typically moving at higher speeds where there can be injury as a result of a collision in addition to water immersion. Wearing of PFDs and rowing are somewhat incompatible due to the nature of the rowing stroke where straps and clips on a PFD could catch fingers and actually cause someone to be ejected from a boat if they could not get their oar clear of the water. In addition, the rowers move in very closely coordinated strokes, and there are circumstances where one rowers hands could become entangled in the PFD on the back of the rower in front of them. This could cause a rower to be ejected from a shell as well.

There is a high level of emphasis on safety in the junior programs. Participants have to pass a swim and treading water test to go out on the water. Shells are not out on the water without coaches present in motor launches. Shells on the Willamette are showing bow and stern lights to help mark the boat in low light situations that occur early and late in the season. This is different from other forms of water sport where in canoes and kayaks, there is probably not a follow launch or in the case of a jet ski or fishing boat where if the boat swamps, or is involved in a collision, self-rescue may not be an option. In addition, following the longstanding exemption by the USCG to the requirement for even carrying PFDs in shells, the oars used in shells have airtight shafts that will help float each person and the hull itself has airtight sections at each end of the boat as well as being constructed of inherently buoyant materials e.g. foam core, wood, etc. Note also the max speed for a rowing shell is about 10 mph so collisions that might occur do not typically incur serious injury as might occur with motorized craft.

I rowed in college at OSU, did some coaching after college and continued to row for another 20 years. I recall the burden of providing for a safe environment for the rowers that I was watching. The coaches involved in junior rowing these days also place a high degree of emphasis on safety as well.

Thankyou for your consideration.

Dave Brunkow, Class of '81 OSU and parent of a junior at Oregon Rowing Unlimited

