

Submitter: Karl Hofmeister
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure: HB3006

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 3006 concerning the mandatory use of personal flotation devices for youth under 16. I support measures to maintain a safe environment while on the water. Unfortunately, this bill fails to address the broad spectrum of water users today. Reviewing testimony posted in support and in opposition to this bill, many advocate from a whitewater perspective, while those in opposition cite issues from a rowing perspective. My testimony concerns both, based on raising two children that grew up on Oregon whitewater since the age of 5, one of which competed as a rower with Rose City Rowing Club. The target of this bill appears to target an exemption for float tubes from PFD requirements. In the case of whitewater, it's understandable. The bill unfortunately fails to take into consideration the added risk, and simply the challenge, of competitive rowing on flat water while wearing a PFD.

U.S. Coast Guard regulations make an exception from wearing PFDs while rowing (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/33/175.17>). In competitive rowing, qualified athletes move their body back and forth in the boat, two to three feet with every stroke, 18-30 strokes per minute. That's 18-30 times per minute for a youth to catch a strap under a seat, or in a rigger that is supporting the oarlock. Each oar in an eight person boat is 12.5 feet long, and to maintain a safe, set boat, the athletes must work in unison. Not only can the PFD prevent the youth from rapidly exiting the boat in the event of capsizing; it could actually create the situation to risk capsizing the vessel.

The safest situation is to have youth that are accustomed to water; that they learned to swim when they were young. That they are provided with opportunities to enjoy the water, and in doing so increase their appreciation, and their respect for Oregon's rivers. PFDs make sense in a lot of different situations on the water, especially in the case of whitewater. They don't add the same value in rowing.

In the current version of this bill, there is a risk of dramatically reducing youth watersports participation through a piece of legislation that doesn't address all users and all cases. I support safer rivers, safer kids using Oregon rivers, and I oppose House Bill 3006.