

Submitter: Jeffrey Sopko

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee on Judiciary

Measure: HB3006

I am writing to request an exception to HB 3006 for youth rowers in Oregon that is in line with the exception offered by the U.S. Coast Guard. "33 CFR § 175.17 - Exemptions. CFR § 175.17 Exemptions. (a) Canoes and kayaks 16 feet or more in length are exempted from the requirements for carriage of the additional throwable PFD required under § 175.15(b). (b) Racing shells, rowing sculls, racing canoes, and racing kayaks are exempted from the requirements for carriage of any PFD required under § 175.15."

I am a parent of a youth rower. While I am supportive of PFD use in most situations, I have deep concerns about the proposed requirement that youth rowers wear PFDs.

My biggest concern is that a pdf will INCREASE the chance of injury or harm while our children are rowing. Sculling and sweeping are sports in which oars tips are brought very close to the bodies of the athletes while they slide on moving seats on rails with their feet tied into shoes attached to the boat. Rowers wear unisuits that are fitted snugly to their body to avoid entanglement as this can result in boat ejection and injury. In the event of a capsize, it is likely that a PFD will complicate a rower's extraction from the boat, due to entanglement. Rowing shells are designed with features that allow an athlete to free themselves of the boat as easily as possible in the event of capsize. All rowers train for this exact situation so they do not get trapped under the shell. Additionally, organized rowing programs are equipped with safety launches that contain lifejackets for the athletes. Rowing practices are closely supervised and the safety record for youth rowing programs nationwide is excellent.

It is for these reasons that rowers are exempted nationwide from wearing PFDs while rowing, according to federal Coast Guard regulations. While I applaud any initiatives to increase water safety, I do not believe that mandating that youth rowers wear PFDs will achieve a safer overall experience.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Jeffrey Sopko