

Submitter: David Sohigian

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

# Draft Letter of Support for Senate Bill 301

Dear Senate Committee on Energy and Environment,

My name is Dave Sohigian and I'm a regular wakesurf enthusiast on the Willamette River. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 301, which directs the State Marine Board to conduct a comprehensive study on motorboat safety.

As someone who has safely enjoyed water sports while diligently following all existing regulations, I believe the current restrictions deserve careful reconsideration. The existing laws were enacted hastily during the closing days of a previous legislative session without proper research or stakeholder input, resulting in regulations that unfairly impact recreational boaters.

The current situation has created a puzzling inconsistency on the Newberg Pool: boats with higher dry weights (like fishing or pontoon boats up to 5,500 pounds) can legally tow tubers, while many modern recreational boats with lower dry weights are prohibited simply because they have ballast capability—even when that ballast isn't being used. This has effectively banned over 90% of new recreational boat models from this section of the river, hurting local businesses and limiting family recreation options.

The existing "maximum ballast capacity" standard is particularly problematic. Some families who deliberately purchased boats with smaller ballast systems to stay under the 5,500-pound combined weight limit have still been denied permits because other models in the same boat line offer larger ballast options. There's no consistent national standard for registering ballast capacity, creating confusion for boaters trying to comply with regulations.

A thorough, evidence-based study as proposed in SB 301 would provide much-needed clarity and fairness. Even with the changes this bill might eventually support, the Newberg Pool would remain one of Oregon's most regulated waterways, requiring boaters to complete safety education, apply for special decals, and pay additional fees.

I urge you to support this legislation, which would benefit local small businesses and families like mine who simply want to safely enjoy our favorite water activities during our brief Oregon summer.

Respectfully,  
Dave Sohigian