

Submitter: Emma Dougherty

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

My name is Emma Dougherty, and I'm a frequent and passionate user of the Willamette River. I'm writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 301—a fair and necessary step to ensure that all boaters are treated equally in the deep waters of the Newberg Pool.

Currently, boaters with ballast-capable vessels are unfairly restricted from towing activities such as tubing, water skiing, and wakeboarding—even when their ballast tanks are completely empty. The issue lies in how boat weight is calculated: an unused ballast system is counted toward the 5,500-pound weight limit, while other boats, like fishing or pontoon boats with a higher dry weight, are allowed to tow simply because they lack ballast capability.

This inconsistency not only creates confusion for boaters, but also makes enforcement difficult for the Oregon State Marine Board. There is no national standard for measuring or registering ballast capacity, making the rules hard to apply and even harder to follow. What's more, families who intentionally purchased lighter boats with smaller ballast systems to comply with the rules are still being denied permits—just because their boat's model line includes versions with larger ballast, even if they don't own that model.

This legislation fixes that. It simplifies the rules, supports compliance, and allows everyday Oregonians to participate safely and responsibly in water sports on one of the most highly regulated stretches of river in the state. Boaters will still be required to meet the weight requirement, complete a safety course, apply for a towed watersports decal, and pay additional fees.

I don't believe the original intent of the policy was to exclude over 90% of modern recreational boats from this waterway or to harm local businesses that serve our community. Families like mine simply want a fair opportunity to enjoy the river—responsibly, safely, and for just a few short months each year.

Please support Senate Bill 301 and help preserve both access and fairness on the Willamette River.