

Good Morning –

- Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 597, requiring Life Jackets for Children while boating on State waters.
- My Name is Division Chief Tim Mrowiec of the City of Madison Fire Department. I am the Special Operations Chief – which includes the Madison Fire Department’s Lake Rescue Team comprised of 57 Lake Rescue Members
- I am strongly in favor of this bill, as it is necessary to protect children as well as adults in our state.
- This isn’t just a local issue here in Madison; Wisconsin is comprised of over 15,000 lakes and other bodies of water.
- Oddly enough, Wisconsin and Virginia are the only two states with no law on the books for this important safety issue.
- Wisconsin has had laws requiring the use of child passenger safety seats in automobiles for some time now; it is well past time that we protect the lives of children who are enjoying our lakes.

Dangers

- A child participating in any water sport—be it water-skiing, fishing, canoeing, and paddle boarding—should be wearing a life jacket for the safety of the child in case of an emergency, as well as the safety of parents and bystanders who may attempt to rescue a child.
- In my 25 years as a member of the Lake Rescue Team I have witnessed too many incidents of a child drowning or struggling in the water. Often, a panicked parent or bystander will jump into the water to save the child. As a parent of two young boys, I can relate to doing anything and everything to save my child. But even if the parent or bystander is a strong swimmer, time is not on their side, and they can become potential victims themselves.
- Time and time again, out on the water with the Lake Rescue team or on my days off, I see small children riding on boats without life jackets. It is estimated that 50% of children on boats in Wisconsin do not wear life jackets. Something as simple as a slip off the boat can turn a fun and relaxing day into a nightmare for the family. Boat accidents, compounded by congested lakes and unattended children, are a tragic recipe for disaster.
- For the most part, people are respectful of the law. Child safety seat use in automobiles skyrocketed once the use of the seats was mandated by law. So it will be with child life jackets as well. Most parents who either never really thought about the possible dangers of boating or have been too casual about the use of life jackets will now ensure their child wears a life jacket on Wisconsin waters if this law requiring them passes.
- Senate Bill 597 is a win-win for Wisconsin families; not only would this bill protect our children, but this common-sense law may also prevent the tragic deaths of others trying to save the life of a small child.
- In closing, I strongly urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 597. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak and for considering my remarks.

• Timothy J. Mrowiec, Division Chief—Special Operations, Madison Fire Department  
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**TO: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy**  
**FROM: Libbe Slavin, Safe Kids Wisconsin Coordinator, Safe Kids of Wisconsin**  
**DATE: 2/3/16**  
**RE: Support Senate Bill 597 – Life Jacket Requirements**

Good morning Chairman Cowles and committee members. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share testimony today. My name is Libbe Slavin and I am the Safe Kids Wisconsin Coordinator.

Safe Kids Wisconsin is part of the international network of Safe Kids Worldwide, with over 400 coalitions globally that focus on unintentional injuries in children 0-19 years of age. Safe Kids Wisconsin is led by Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to achieve our common goal of keeping Wisconsin kids safe by preventing unintentional injuries.

SB 597 would prohibit the operator of a recreational vessel from carrying a passenger who is under the age of 13 unless, during all times when the vessel is underway, the child is wearing a life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Safe Kids continually strives to prevent unintentional injuries of children throughout the state. From this commitment, many of Safe Kids' coalitions are involved with a variety of water safety programs including life jacket loaner stations. They coordinate the building and maintenance of stations throughout Wisconsin that hold life jackets at various boat landings and swim areas. These stations are created to address the need when a family gets ready to launch their boat and realize they don't have appropriate life jackets for everyone aboard. Most of them are on water ways of high need, either high volume boat traffic or significant drowning incidences.

Our children place their trust in our hands and it is our obligation to ensure their safety at all times. SB 597 centralizes the focus on the driver of the vessel to protect the child through the use of a life jacket. Something as simple as wearing a life jacket could very well be the difference between saving the child's life and drowning.

This bill will create safety habits that children can continue to develop well into adulthood in order to minimize casualties. According to the Wisconsin Department Natural Resources (DNR), from 2000-2015 a total of 307 incidences of drowning were recorded for all ages. Of the 307, there were only 42 individuals wearing a life jacket. Looking closer at the data, we found 38 of those 307 incidences were child related with only 4 confirmed wearing a life jacket. We are greatly alarmed at these numbers and due to the data presented feel the need to support legislation which enforces children wearing life jackets at all times. Through this legislation we have the potential to save children's lives.

Currently every state except Wisconsin and Virginia have a state law requiring life jackets.

Chairman Cowles and committee members, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of SB 597. If you have any more questions you can contact me via email at [LSlavin@chw.org](mailto:LSlavin@chw.org) or via telephone at 715-843-1890.



**Al Ott**

State Representative • 3rd Assembly District

**Senate Bill 597**  
**Life Jacket Requirements for Children**  
**Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy**  
**February 3, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 597 (SB 597), which requires children under the age of 13 to wear life jackets while on boats.

Current state law requires that properly fitting life jackets be readily accessible for each person onboard a boat. There is no requirement, however, that those life jackets be worn by passengers, regardless of age.

Every other state in the country, with the exception of Virginia, has a requirement that children wear a life jacket while boating. Additionally, the federal government requires children under 13 to wear a life jacket while on federally regulated waters. In Wisconsin, this means Lake Michigan, Lake Superior and the Mississippi River.

The majority of states (31), require children under the age of 13 to wear life jackets. Two states, (and the District of Columbia) have higher age requirements. Fifteen states have lower age requirements. Of Wisconsin's four neighboring states, Illinois and Iowa require life jackets for children under 13, Minnesota requires children under 10 to wear a life jacket, and Michigan applies the requirement to children under six years of age.

SB 597 requires children under the age of 13 to wear a properly fitting life jacket while onboard a moving vessel. This requirement would not apply if the child is below deck or inside an enclosed cabin.

The age requirement under this bill is consistent with federal law, and in line with most other states.

Requiring children to wear life jackets while boating is a common-sense safety measure. You wouldn't put your child or grandchild in a car without being buckled in a safety seat or safety belt, so why would you send them out on open water without a life jacket?

You will hear from a number of folks today who have been impacted by situations where children were not wearing a life jacket. You will hear of adults dying when they jumped in the water to save their drowning children. I ask that you listen closely to these stories and consider how requiring children to wear life jackets could, indeed, save lives.

Thank you for your time and your thoughtful consideration of this legislation.

## Life Jacket Requirements for Children

Child Safety State Law Tracker – Safe Kids Worldwide  
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004

State	Requirement
Alabama	Under 8
Alaska	Under 13
Arizona	Under 13
Arkansas	Under 13
California	Under 13
Colorado	Under 13
Connecticut	Under 13
District of Columbia	Under 18
Delaware	Under 13
Florida	Under 6
Georgia	Under 13
Hawaii	Under 13
Idaho	Under 15
Illinois	Under 13
Indiana	Under 13
Iowa	Under 13
Kansas	Under 13
Kentucky	Under 12
Louisiana	Under 17
Maine	Under 11
Maryland	Under 13
Massachusetts	Under 12
Michigan	Under 6
Minnesota	Under 10
Mississippi	Under 13
Missouri	Under 7
Montana	Under 12
Nebraska	Under 13
Nevada	Under 13
New Hampshire	Under 13
New Jersey	Under 13
New Mexico	Under 13
New York	Under 12
North Carolina	Under 13
North Dakota	Under 11
Ohio	Under 10
Oklahoma	Under 13
Oregon	Under 13
Pennsylvania	Under 13
Rhode Island	Under 13
South Carolina	Under 12
South Dakota	Under 7
Tennessee	Under 13
Texas	Under 13
Utah	Under 13
Vermont	Under 12
Virginia	None
Washington	Under 13
West Virginia	Under 13
Wisconsin	None
Wyoming	Under 13