



Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

AB 575 – Use of Life Jackets for Children Under the age of 10

November 8, 2017

Chairman Kleefisch and fellow committee members –

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of AB 575, requiring that a person under the age of 10 to wear a life jacket at all times when a vessel is underway and the person isn't below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

Last session, I was chair of the committee that held a public hearing on a similar bill. The committee heard personal accounts from families and friends who lost a loved one and from law enforcement that was tasked with searching for victims. The testimony was incredibly moving and informative and illustrated why the bill before you today is important and could help to prevent additional tragedies.

In as little as 20 seconds a child can be underwater and gone. They often aren't heard by someone nearby because they are gasping for air and unable to scream for help. Last year, there were over 560 drowning deaths in recreational boating accidents in the United States. Of these fatalities, 83% were not wearing a life jacket.

Current state law requires life jackets to be readily accessible for each person aboard, however, there is nothing in statute requiring that the life jacket must be worn. Wisconsin has over 15,000 documented lakes, yet we're only one of two states in the country that does not require children to wear a life jacket while boating.

At the hearing last session, we heard several accounts where the person who drowned wasn't the child initially in trouble, but the panicked parent who dove in after them. Had the child been wearing a properly fitted life jacket designed to keep their head above water, there likely wouldn't have been a need to jump in the water after them.

Once again, thank you for holding a hearing on AB 575. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

Assembly Bill 575

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Thank you Chairman Kleefisch and Committee Members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 575, a bill that addresses a serious problem that has unfortunately impacted my district heavily this year. I regret that I could not appear before you today to discuss the merits of this bill.

As lawmakers, the citizens of Wisconsin depend on us to create responsible laws that ensure the safety of our youth. This bill will allow us to follow through on that expectation by combating the high number of drownings that have plagued our state.

Wisconsin is currently one of only two states that do not require minors to wear life jackets while boating, which goes against our efforts to protect our children while teaching them to respect and enjoy the great outdoors. Current law requires life jackets to be readily accessible for each person aboard, however, there is nothing in statute that states the life jacket must be worn. This bill will require children under 10 to wear a life jacket when on a boat.

Last year, there were over 560 drowning deaths in recreational boating accidents in the United States. Of these fatalities, 83% were not wearing a life jacket. Having floatation devices readily accessible is not enough. By requiring children to wear life jackets we look to reduce the number of tragic deaths in boating accidents and make summers safer for families across Wisconsin.

I would like to thank Representative Mursau for his leadership and support on this serious safety issue. Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony on this bill.

Eau Claire Water Safety Task Force

November 8th 2017

4405 Crest Court
Eau Claire, WI 54701

Members of the Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Committee:

I am writing to express my support for the passage of Life Jackets Requirements for Children" Bill AB575.

As Chair of the Eau Claire Water Safety Task Force, I represent members of our organization supporting this legislation. We are a community based partnership between local and state governmental agencies, area businesses, the Eau Claire Area School District as well as a number of volunteer organizations. Our goal is to reduce the incidence of drowning here in the Chippewa Valley.

Upon hearing of the introduction of this bill, we were surprised to learn Wisconsin is one of only two states in the US which do not require children to wear life jackets. I personally had always believed they were required and as a parent had ensured my children were protected by a PFD when on the water. I have also since learned that Federal law requires the use of a flotation device on children but this is only applied while on Federally controlled waters such as the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River system. I would think the State of Wisconsin should have had this requirement in place long ago.

Please carefully consider passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

David A. Whitehouse

EAU CLAIRE WATER SAFETY TASK FORCE
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November 2, 2017

The Honorable Joel Kleefisch
Wisconsin State Assembly
Chair - Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage
State Capitol
Room 216 North
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Chairman Kleefisch:

We write in support of A 575, proposed by Representative Jeffrey Mursau, which will strengthen the law in Wisconsin on life jacket use for children under the age of 10 in recreational vessels. This is so important because boating plays such an important part in Wisconsin's recreational culture—our state's citizens and visitors enjoy over 44,000 miles of rivers and 15,000 lakes aboard more than 625,000 registered boats. This bill represents needed protection for the most vulnerable users of our state's beautiful waterways, our children.

The bill will require passengers under 10 years old on recreational vessels to wear a properly fitting life jacket when not below deck or inside an enclosed cabin. Evidence shows how important this requirement is:

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drowning is the number one cause of death for children 1-4, and the second leading cause for children 5-9.¹
- Recreational boating accidents in the U.S. resulted in over 500 people drowning last year alone, 83% of whom were not wearing a life jacket.²
- A child can go under the surface in a drowning situation in as little as 20 seconds, and can drown in mere minutes—all of which often occurs noiselessly.³
- For every child who drowns, an additional four are hospitalized for near-drowning. As many as 20 percent of these near-drowning survivors will suffer from permanent, severe neurological disability.⁴

These factors explain why 48 other states in the U.S. have enacted similar legislation to safeguard young children on the water. By contrast, an almost identical law has been in effect in our neighbor state Minnesota since 2005.

Safe Kids is a network of organizations around the country and globe dedicated to protecting kids from unintentional injury, which is the number one cause of death for children in the United States. Our local and state coalitions number more than 400 across the country, working on a range of injuries from drownings to sports injuries. Our presence in Wisconsin is strong, with 12 coalitions led by Safe Kids Wisconsin at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin in Wausau.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Libbe R. Slavin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Libbe Slavin
Coordinator
Safe Kids Wisconsin



¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "10 Leading Causes of Injury Deaths by Age Group Highlighting Unintentional Injury Deaths, United States, 2010, Available at https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/10lcid_unintentional_deaths_2010-a.pdf

² United States Coast Guard/Inspections & Compliance Directorate. (2017). *2016 Recreational Boating Statistics*. Washington, DC. US Department of Homeland Security. Available at: <https://www.uscgboating.org/library/accident-statistics/Recreational-Boating-Statistics-2016.pdf>

³ Safe Kids Worldwide. (2016). *Keeping Kids Safe In and Around Water: Exploring Misconceptions that Lead to Drowning*. Washington, DC. Available at: https://www.safekids.org/sites/default/files/small_water_safety_study_2016.pdf

⁴ Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention. (2013). *Aquatic Injury Facts: Drowning & Near-Drowning Accidents*. Available at: <http://www.aquaticisf.org/facts.htm>



COLUMBIA COUNTY

Sheriff's Office

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FAX: Sheriff's Office 608-742-0598 Jail /Dispatch Center 608-742-5225
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711 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 132
Portage, WI 53901-0132

November 1, 2017

Office of Senator Jerry Petrowski
11N State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

RE: AB575

Dear Senator Petrowski:

I am writing to voice my support for AB575 "Life Jackets Requirements for Children." As Sheriff of Columbia County, I have unfortunately responded personally and we as a department to far too many water rescues that became a death investigation. The vast majority of which could have been prevented if only a life jacket had been worn by the victim.

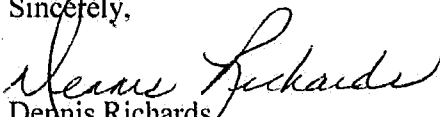
A 2016 report from the US Coast Guard shows that out of 509 drowning deaths during recreational boating, 404 of those deaths were to victims not wearing a life jacket. Another 23 of 509 deaths, life jacket use was unknown. As shown in past studies, the majority of recreational boating deaths, 70%, are from drowning. In cases where the death was from drowning, 85% were not wearing a life jacket.

Children are often times beginning swimmers or unable to swim at all. Lifeguards and rescue personnel have difficulty seeing and finding a victim in rough and dark waters where people recreate in Wisconsin. A life jacket will not only keep a victim afloat, but also make them visible and their eventual rescue more successful.

With advances in comfort and functionality, newer life vests are easy to wear, comfortable, and provide peace of mind for parents. I hope no family ever has to experience a loss of a loved one, especially a child, while recreating or on vacation in the beautiful Wisconsin outdoors. Far too often I have heard "if only" when meeting with the surviving family when tragedy strikes.

Drowning can be prevented by proper use of life jackets and floatation devices. I urge you to support and pass this common sense bill to protect our children.

Sincerely,


Dennis Richards
Sheriff