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Testimony In favor of LD 1663 An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters May 5, 2021

Sen. Dill, Rep. Landry and Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, I am Jessica Fay, Representing House District 66 parts of Casco, Poland and Raymond. I am pleased to be with you today to introduce LD 1633 “An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters”.

I have been hearing concerns from constituents and neighbors for years about boating safety. When people are unaware of boating laws it can have a significant impact on everyone’s enjoyment of our waters. When people don’t know the “rules of the road” they are more likely to cause harm to other boaters, passengers, wildlife and the environment. This Committee has heard a number of bills already this session that might have been unnecessary if those of us out of the water understood the laws and responsibilities that come along with operating motorized watercraft.

This bill’s goal is to make sure that new operators have the knowledge of those rules so that they and the people, property and natural resources around them remain safe and unharmed.

The goal of the bill is to make sure those who don’t already have an understanding of boating safety laws are exposed to them before they operate motorized watercraft over 10Hp. If someone over the age of 16 passes the course they can operate a motorized watercraft without supervision. What isn’t in the bill is a requirement that temporary visitors pass the course, though I would be happy to offer that as an amendment if the Committee thought that wise. I have left the design and other specifics about how the course should be administered to Dept. rulemaking. Though I envision an online course similar to what New Hampshire requires.

We already have laws and rules in place that should be followed, but there are few ways for people new to Maine or to our boating laws to learn about those laws unless they really seek them out. By requiring a Boater Safety Course we can be sure that people have read and understood the laws and this will likely save lives and property.

I know that there need to be some changes made to accommodate some of the apprenticeship programs in DMR, and there are likely to be ways that DIFW can suggest that will make the bill better and more effective. I hope that this Committee will consider those.

I have stories I could share about how unsafe boating impacts all of our constituents, and I'd bet that each of you have heard similar stories. Whether it is someone who didn't understand what a marker buoy means and they fetch up on a rock. As more and more people come to Maine to enjoy our resources, it will take a bit more effort to help them understand Maine's boating laws so that we can all continue to enjoy our time on the water, regardless of whether we are paddling, fishing, sailing or just sitting on the dock watching the world go by.