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Testimony of Representative Grayson Lookner in Support of LD 1663, "An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters."

May 5, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and honorable colleagues on the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My Name is Grayson Lookner, and I represent the neighborhoods of Libbytown, Nason's Corner, Rosemont, and Stroudwater in Portland. I'm here to testify in support of LD 1663 "An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters." I want to thank Representative Fay for introducing this important bill.

Some of my earliest memories from childhood are of Kristen McKellar, her sister, and my sister playing in our front yard. I remember being a little intimidated by that rambunctious trio, and that fear would not diminish as the years and decades passed. Kristen was a compassionate, energetic, and beautiful soul whose life was cut tragically short after being struck by a motorboat while swimming in a Maine lake a few summers ago. She would have turned 35 this month. That boat was going too fast and it was going too close to shore. The operator however was not found liable – they were not violating any laws.

A boat is a major responsibility, even a small one. People can get in a lot of trouble in non-motorized vessels, like canoes, kayaks, and small sailboats. Sometimes amateurs perish due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge. Even seasoned professionals can get caught off guard and end up in perilous life-or-death situations.

While this bill exempts those smaller recreational watercraft, the risk and responsibility only increases with the size and power of the vessel. Personally, I am a Registered Maine Sea Kayaking guide, and I had to pass a written and oral test to get that certification. Maine's waters are no joke, and those choosing to navigate them in larger, motorized vessels with greater horsepower and hull speeds should certainly have to undergo some sort of training and licensure to keep themselves and others safe.

Maine's waters will see increasing boat traffic in the coming years, from Casco Bay, to Sebago Lake, to the Saint John River, and that means more danger for boaters, swimmers, and beach-goers alike. If we can take one step to prevent death and serious injury to anyone, it will be a worthwhile step to take. Anyone who knew Kristen McKellar would agree.

Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I urge you to vote "ought to pass."