

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
In Support of LD 1663**

**“An Act To Improve Boating Safety”**

Presented by Representative FAY of Raymond  
Cosponsored by Representatives McDONALD of Stonington, RISEMAN of Harrison,  
THERIAULT of China, Senator DIAMOND of Cumberland

**DATE OF HEARING: May 5, 2021**

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Dan Scott, Colonel of the Maine Warden Service, at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of L.D. 1663.

This bill creates a mandatory boating safety course requirement for individuals born after January 1, 2002 for the operation of motorboats over 10 horsepower beginning January 1, 2023. The bill establishes a minimum age of 16 for operation of a motorboat over 10 horsepower and requires the Department to establish a program for boating safety education certification. This bill additionally requires a mandatory boating safety course for an individual born after January 1, 2002 who operates a personal watercraft.

Mandatory boater education has been a topic that has been discussed in Maine for more than 25 years. It was a recommendation in the Final Report of the Great Ponds Task Force in 1999 that was never implemented and is a national issue that is a focus of the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA).

Previous studies by NASBLA show that states having mandatory or enhanced boater education programs in place the longest have lower rates of boating fatalities. States with no education have the highest fatality rates.

Boater education today has expanded well beyond just the safe operation of a boat. NASBLA education standards as an example include: trip planning and preparation, equipment requirements, emergency response, environmental concerns, and many more.

Today, boaters nationwide have a wide variety of online options to obtain high quality education. The Department currently has links to 3 online courses on our website and a schedule for in person boater education courses supported by our Recreational Safety Program. This is a change from 25 years ago and that is why the Department supports the principles of LD 1663.

This Committee has considered several bills this session related to boating behavior, boating impact to property, wildlife, the environment and overall tolerance with various types of noise, motors, operation etc. The Department offered education as a potential solution during many of those discussions.

The Department feels LD 1663 offers an opportunity to develop a robust boater education program in Maine to address many of the issues concerning our citizens and visitors who recreate and live near our inland and coastal waters.

We do need to look at financial impacts related to start up costs and administrative costs. Our staff have already spoken with several companies who provide NASBLA approved online boating courses for other states, inquiring about enhancements regarding invasive species transmission, awareness of wildlife and environmental impact and courteous behavior toward personal property.

We look forward to discussing the details with the Committee and the Marine Resource staff and would be glad to answer questions now or during the work session.