



February 21, 2018

The Honorable Jim Steineke
Wisconsin State Assembly
Chair - Committee on Rules
State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Chairman Steineke:

We write in support of AB 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 offers 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. AB 575 recently passed the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage by a vote of 9-3. Safe Kids is particularly interested in this legislation in light of our upcoming spring drowning report, which focuses in part on the drowning risks children face in open water. It would be great to report that Wisconsin has become the 49th state to pass a life jacket law for children.

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,

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>