

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5691

As Passed Senate, March 11, 2009

Title: An act relating to improving boating programs.

Brief Description: Improving boating programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Brandland, Jacobsen, Shin and Parlette).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/09/09, 2/18/09 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 3/02/09 [DP2S].

Passed Senate: 3/11/09, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5691 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Ranker, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Hatfield, Stevens and Swecker.

Staff: Sherry McNamara (786-7402)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5691 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Tom, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Hewitt, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, Kline, Kohl-Welles, McDermott, Murray, Parlette, Pridemore, Rockefeller and Schoesler.

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7710)

Background: Current law requires the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) to adopt and enforce recreational boating safety rules, including equipment

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and navigating requirements, consistent with the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) regulations.

In 2005 the Legislature required the Commission to establish and provide a mandatory Boating Safety Education Program. The program is being phased in so that all nonexempt boaters are required to obtain a boater education card by January 1, 2016.

The Coast Guard administers the Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) Grant Program. The Commission receives an RBS grant, which requires Washington State's Recreational Boating Safety Program to have:

- a vessel numbering system;
- a Cooperative Boating Safety Assistance Program with the Coast Guard, including sufficient patrol and other activity to ensure adequate enforcement of applicable state boating safety laws and regulations;
- a state boating safety education program that includes the dissemination of information concerning the hazards of operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs; and
- a marine casualty reporting system.

The Coast Guard's RBS grant is limited to one-half of the total cost of the state's boating program. The state must provide matching funds from general state revenues, undocumented vessel numbering and license fees, or state marine fuels taxes. The RBS grant funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis; the state receives no funds in advance. The state must first spend state resource funds and then be reimbursed up to 50 percent by the RBS grant funds.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill: Within funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) must consult with the Commission, recreational boating stakeholders, and the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to:

- contract for a quantification of the needs identified in past studies and reports;
- develop program standards for recreational boating programs;
- determine state and local responsibility;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the boating programs;
- establish a plan for standardized and specialized training;
- identify best practices for law enforcement on-the-water activities; and
- review the funding and expenditures of the state's boating program.

The RCO must submit a preliminary report to the Governor and the Legislature by January 1, 2010. The final report is due by December 1, 2010.

The Commission must designate the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) as an approved boating program for the purpose of obtaining increased federal matching funds.

This act may be referred to as the Recreational Boating Services and Safety Improvement Act of 2009.

The act is null and void if not funded in the state budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): PRO: The bill creates a plan for a structured discussion on how to increase boating safety on our waterways. It is important to examine the efficiencies of the current funding levels in the State Park's program and the allocation of the federal grant funds. In order to improve safety on the water it would help to put more money into local marine law enforcement. Various studies have stated the need for more local marine law enforcement on the waterways to enforce the boating laws. Boater education is best when done right on the water.

CON: The reallocation of 80 percent of the federal funds for local marine law enforcement will throw the rest of the state program out of balance. The other required elements of the state program are essential as well and should not be neglected. Spending only 20 percent of the federal funds on these required components could jeopardize all the federal monies. There are currently 52 local boating safety programs that receive 70 to 75 percent of the state's Recreational Boating Safety Distribution. The current State Parks Boating Program is well-rounded and provides for a balance of funds for local marine law enforcement and boating safety education.

Persons Testifying (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): PRO: Senator Brandland, prime sponsor; Mike Harum, Ed Holmes, Jo Arlow, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; Bruce Bjork, DFW; James McMahan, Washington Association of County Officials.

CON: Steve Greaves, Washington Boating Alliance; Jim King, David Kutz, Recreational Boating Association of Washington; Steven Meacham, Windseekers Sailing Club; Fred Romero, James Horan, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute Bill (Ways & Means): PRO: This legislation is to look at the way we provide boating safety in the state, to improve these programs, and implement better law enforcement. It would be very difficult for local sheriffs' offices to provide this service within their current funding. The money for this purpose does not come from the state General Fund, but rather from the Recreation Resource Account. This is a result of collaboration between law enforcement and stakeholders to coordinate these programs in the state. This bill will also allow DFW to gain access to additional federal funds.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Brandland, prime sponsor; Jim King, Recreational Boating Association of Washington; Mike Harem, Chelan County Sheriff, Washington Association of Police Chiefs; Jo Arlow, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; Cliff Webster, Northwest Marine Trade Association.