

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6250

As Passed Senate, February 2, 1996

Title: An act relating to personal flotation devices.

Brief Description: Requiring personal flotation devices for children on certain recreational vessels.

Sponsors: Senators Owen, Swecker, McAuliffe, Haugen, Sheldon, Winsley, Rinehart, Fairley, Sellar and Cantu.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ecology & Parks: 1/17/96, 1/18/96 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/2/96, 42-5.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Fairley, Vice Chair; Hochstatter, McAuliffe, Spanel and Swecker.

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: Under current state law, vessels operating on waters of the state must have a personal flotation device (life jacket) on board for each person on the vessel. Life jackets are required to be accessible, in serviceable condition, and of an appropriate size. Federal law also requires that recreational vessels have life jackets accessible for all individuals on board.

State law requires that life jackets be worn when individuals are engaged in water skiing, are being towed by a vessel, or are operating a personal watercraft.

Washington State has a higher than average rate of fatalities from boating accidents. It is suggested that requiring children to wear life jackets on smaller vessels will help reduce the number of boating-related fatalities.

Summary of Bill: Children nine years or younger must wear a personal flotation device on vessels under 19 feet in length whenever the vessel is underway.

A violation of this requirement is a misdemeanor if the vessel is carrying passengers for hire. If the vessel is not carrying passengers for hire, a violation of this requirement is a civil infraction.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill is a simple, inexpensive way to save children's lives. Washington has the worst boating fatality rate in the country; most drowning is preventable.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Bill Wiester, Sheriffs Assn.; Susan Day, educator; Linda Quan, Seattle Children's Hospital; Cleve Pinnix, State Parks; Capt. Hotekains, U.S. Coast Guard; Elizabeth Bennett, Seattle Children's Hospital; Jack Swanberg, NW Marine Trade Assn.; Karen Jones, Black Lake Fire Dept.