

State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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Via email to: env.testimony@cga.ct.gov

March 5, 2013

Environment Committee
Room 3200, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: H.B. No. 6541-- AN ACT CONCERNING ON-LINE EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR
BOATING AND HUNTING SAFETY

The following correspondence is in support of H.B. No. 6541 sponsored by Senator Edward Meyer and Representative Linda M. Gentile.

During the 48th New Mexico Legislature, Senate Bill 118 (SB 118) was passed and enacted new sections of the State of New Mexico Boat Act requiring rules for mandatory boating education to include diverse education delivery options that are nationally accredited and state certified. The legislation allowed for the delivery of these accredited and certified courses to be provided by an in-person/instructor led or online course format.

SB 118 is the result of Senate Joint Memorial 15 (SJM 15), which passed the 47th Legislature in 2005 and requested the State Parks Division (SPD) to study the options for and feasibility of implementing expanded boating safety education programs for operators of motorboats in the State of New Mexico. The resulting study, "Improving Recreational Boating Safety in New Mexico," was completed by SPD and was presented to the Interim Committee on Water and Natural Resources in November 2005. The study made a number of conclusions, including:

- The vast majority of motorboat operators involved in boating accidents have no formal boating education or training.
- Offering free, in person, voluntary boating safety education classes is successful and well regarded, but seriously under-utilized.
- There is widespread support for mandatory boating safety education programs for boat operators by the recreational boating industry.
- Boating safety education reduces accidents, injuries, and related financial impacts to society, such as health care and insurance costs.

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Due to high staff vacancy rates and less volunteer instructor hours, as well as less time for boaters to participate within in person course attendance, our State was experiencing declining boating education course attendance. However, due to the opportunity for boaters to take the class online, we have reached our legislative performance measures for successful boating education course completions each year. The online course formats effectively provide boaters greater flexibility for managing their personal time and resources, provides consistent curriculum delivery, meets the need of technology savvy boater's, and increases uniformity and reciprocity between states so that boat education is more widely accepted across state lines.

The demand for public space on the limited waterways in New Mexico has never been greater. Each year, more and more people experience the pleasures of recreational boating. Accident statistics, and the tragedy surrounding drownings, all point to the necessity for better educated boat operators. In the majority of states in this country, formal online education has become mandatory for registration and/or operation of a boat upon their waters, primarily because boat education works. In summary, the objective and results of online boating education programs are to increase the safe operation of motorboats and provide a safer recreation environment by reducing boat accidents that result in injury, death and property damage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Toby Velasquez', written over the printed name.

Toby Velasquez, Chief
Law Enforcement & Boating Safety Bureau
New Mexico State Parks Division