

REMARKS PREPARED FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING - March 8, 2013

My name is FRANK KEMP, I live at 20 Seagate Road, Darien Connecticut.

Although I am a member of several boating organizations and boards, I am speaking on my own behalf and I am not representing any of those organizations.

A review of HB # 6541 will show that the premise behind this bill is not in the best interests of the boating public, or of the State.

There are three reasons that I believe will support this view:

First - The un-suitability of "Distance Learning" to boating education in Connecticut.

While On-Line Training, Computer Based Training, or "Distance Learning" is now in use, and successfully used, in many fields – it is not right for teaching boating.

It has been the topic very much in the public view – because it is very useful. Tom Friedman wrote a whole column on it this Wednesday .. all about the "Massive Open Online Courses." Quite impressive, quite complicated to deliver, and probably the right way to go for our major universities, and "virtual universities" of the future.

But let's look at the state of on-line training, in the states that have put it up for use. The course-ware is little more than a series of PowerPoint panels, with a bit of gimmicky animations and maybe a film clip spliced in. There are no meetings with mentors, no sessions for questions and answers, just hour after hour of screen after screen.

In fact, one of the features that is supposed to enhance the product being touted by DEEP is the fact that there is a "break" – or a "timer" so that students can't go too fast. This supposedly good thing about a "managed on-line" course is that ...you can't get through it too quickly – there is a timer to keep you back. Keep you back? This is really not the type of on-line education that Tom Friedman or the big universities are talking about.

Call me old fashioned, but I know for sure that an active sport, such as boating, requiring dexterity and judgment, just can't be taught by computer. At least not now, and not by a "managed on-line" course where you are forced to go slow.

A boating education class is a time to ask questions. A boating education class is a time to share information about what works and what doesn't. A boating education class is a time to listen to other people's questions – and learn from them.

And, yes, a boating education class is an opportunity to read a compass, puzzle over a chart, hold a radio, tie a bowline. Maybe these topics are beyond the NASBLA-approved standard – but they are part of coastal boating competence, and they are found in the classroom experience or on the water, and not through a screen shot.

In this regard, it's important to realize that NASBLA – the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators – necessarily represents the interests of all 50 states. But Connecticut – unlike the majority of the states – has an open coastline. Boating education in Connecticut should include not only the minimum requirements for safe boating on land-locked lakes, but also information required for safe boating on coastal waters.

To the Boating Division's credit, this missing component of required boating education in our state has been addressed by the "Coastal Boater Endorsement" program. Such a program would be entirely neglected by a move to Distance Learning.

### Second - The arguments that distance learning is needed in Connecticut.

In the past three years, as this topic has been considered, we have heard that Connecticut needs to implement "Distance Learning" because it is being done in other parts of the country.

Well, that's fine – for other parts of the country, and, indeed, it may be necessary where there are geographical problems.

However, this is just not the case in this small coastal state. Here is why. There are coastal counties and there are inland counties. The coastal counties are well populated by volunteer organizations and private companies that have been providing training for years, and do it well. As for the inland counties, it is still only about 40 miles to the coast, – and that is the worst case – for there are several upstate training centers, well established, and already in use.

So let's not be swayed by the assertion that says "Distance Learning" is appropriate for our state" – it just won't fly.

### Third - let's look at the financial rationale that DEEP has presented as a reason for allowing on-line training as an equivalent for classroom training.

This argument goes that: the State is getting out of CLASSROOM training - therefore the State SHOULD authorize computer training.

This argument just doesn't make sense.

On one hand the LEAN studies led to the conclusion that the state could save several hundred thousand dollars by GETTING OUT of their classroom training service.

So - that's been the announced course of action, going on to three years now. However, we keep hearing of this decision, to get out of the training business, as some sort of "bargain" – as a 'quid pro quo.'

The argument goes like this: the State is getting out of the training business, so now, on-line training is being implemented because the State is getting out of the training business.

If this sounds circular, it is. There is no “linkage” here. If the State is to get out of training – then fine – it should just get out of the business of training. There is no logical link to opening the state to on-line training “because” the state is stopping teaching.

But, for a moment, consider if the State really stops teaching. Then, what will happen?

It is very probable that commercial and volunteer agencies will fill the need. Market forces will do just that. It only seems fair to give them a chance to succeed.

Why should the State drop their program of classroom education one day, and then authorize a controversial and unexamined method of boating education the next day?

Again, the market forces – of commercial and volunteer agencies who know boating education - should be given a chance to fill the void that the state is leaving when it exits the playing field.

Finally, I'd like to draw your attention to the [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov) site for HR 6541. As of late last night there were over 250 letters out there, and I've looked at every one. There are no more than 25 letters supporting this bill, and the balance – over two hundred, are in opposition.

Some of the opposing letters make for a good read, and they are from leaders in the community: Captain Henry Marx, Harbormasters, Auxiliary and Squadron instructors, students and experts. But they are also from the non-experts – read the one from Lisa Gaines – the Mom who lost her daughter in the July 4<sup>th</sup> accident in Oyster Bay. When she is upset about lowering standards for boating education – we all should listen.

Also, look at the towns the letters are from – the disappointment with DEEP for making this proposal is wide, as well as being deep.

**The mission of the Boating Division of DEEP is Boating Safety**

The mission of the Boating Division is Boating Safety. It's mission is not software development, software promotion, or social engineering by ‘guessing’ what is best for the new boating students. The mission of the Division is: Boating Safety. Distance Learning does not equal “Boating Safety.”

HR 6541 is just bad for boating education, it is bad for the boating community, it is bad for future students, and it is a misstep for the Boating Division' primary mission: Boating Safety.

For these reasons I recommend that the Committee should not proceed with this bill.

Thank you for your attention.