



Public Hearing
February 27, 2015
Environmental Committee
Testimony Submitted by Joseph & Pamela Fedorko

Committee Bill #699:

An act establishing a minimum age for towing any person by vessel and requiring the completion of a safe towing course prior to engaging in such towing by vessel.

Good morning Senators Kennedy and Chapin, Representatives Albis and Shaban, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee.

My name is Joseph Fedorko, I am here with my wife Pamela, along with our district Representative and friend, Senator Scott Frantz.

Most of you may be aware; Pam and I are the parents of Emily Fedorko, who lost her life almost seven months ago in a tubing accident on Long Island Sound.

Emily was a beautiful 16-year-old girl, who excelled in athletics and was extremely intelligent. Her sophomore year, she exceeded in school taking all honor courses finishing with a 4.49 GPA.

What was special about Emily was her commitment to learn. She always strived for perfection. In class, she had the ability to take notes so when you read them you understood what was being taught immediately. When she handed in homework, it was in her best penmanship and free of any mistakes.

This was Emily.

What makes this so important is that current boating safety courses have very little on the topic of towing. This includes water skiing, tubing or boarding. Education is the leading way we can teach our young adults safety. Our daughter Emily took her safety course along with my youngest daughter and wife on June 28th, 2014, five weeks before she past. Emily took intense notes that day. My wife, Pam, can attest that there wasn't anything taught regarding towing of water sports.

I have been an avid boater my entire life. I grew up fishing on various boats as well as water skiing, tubing and knee boarding on many lakes throughout Connecticut, including Long Island Sound. I have owned a boat since I was 12. Our children have been exposed to boating since they were very young and we always taught safety. All five of us have our safety certificates.

I understand the difficulty and seriousness of towing, from both the operator's view as well as the riders view. Education in the classroom is just part of it. Having the ability to make quick decisions comes with AGE and EXPERIENCE. Towing requires even more. The operator needs to be alert and aware of his/her surroundings. They also need to understand the responsibility of pulling a rider.

Unfortunately, on August 6, 2014, Emily went out with three of her best friends looking to have fun on the water. As a result of inexperience, she lost her life tubing while her best friend was driving.

Boats are faster, equipment is more advanced, and technology has become more complex. We simply must educate our young adults, as well as any new boater, with all we can on safety on and off the water.

We allow our kids to get their driving license at 16. This comes with many restrictions. So why wouldn't we want to add some rules to anyone who is looking to drive a boat while towing someone? Boats don't have a seat belt or brakes and riders are at the mercy of the operator. The age restriction for towing with a personal watercraft, or Jet Ski, is 16. Why would we not want the same age restriction for a boat with a propeller?

Connecticut has led the way in water safety. We need to continue to follow that trend and adapt to make our waters even safer.

Pam and I stand here today knowing that our daughter Emily is gone forever. We have to live with that. We have established the Emily Catherine Fedorko Foundation a non-profit to honor her, but most of all educate as many people as we can in water sport safety. We need to learn from this, so we can make a difference and protect someone from the pain we feel everyday. As a legislative body you have the ability to require better education and training in order to prevent another tragedy. Please help us make a difference and pass bill #699.

Thank you for your time. We are happy to answer any questions that you have.