

Testimony on HB-2695  
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I served as Director of the State Marine Board from 1984 to 2010, beginning when Victor Atiyeh was Governor. So I have more than a little experience working with the members of the Marine Board. Recognizing that this bill was introduced by the Committee Chair, I feel obligated to tell the committee that this is a bad bill.

I don't know what sin the Board committed that requires this radical makeover, but there appears to be a nexus with HB-2555 and wakeboarding, which is a longstanding hot potato. It seems that in their desire to ban wakeboarding on the Willamette River, advocates want to dismantle and re-design the Marine Board to achieve their goals. This is not the right answer. If the Board can't make everyone happy, you don't throw out the Board. If the Legislature has a better prescription for wakeboarding, set that in policy, but don't destroy the Board in the process over one issue.

It saddens me to see an effort to re-make the Board using identity politics and labels. This will not enhance the Board, but instead divide the Board into interest group camps and members who feel an obligation to represent their identity point of view rather than a broader public interest.

I had the privilege of working with dozens of Marine Board members during my career. These men and women came from all walks of life. They included persons from business, teachers, lawyers, county government, boat builders, guides, and even former legislators. Great people to work with, who all had a few things in common.

First and foremost, they all brought a desire to serve as citizen volunteers, giving many hours of often thankless work for only mileage and per diem. They also brought a variety of points of view and a willingness to listen, learn and make decisions based on the boating statutes and policies. They brought a personal interest in boats and boating, and public safety. Nobody had a label, and it worked just fine.

It is a mistake to exclude persons who might want to serve on the Board because they don't check a certain box. Or because that box is already filled. In addition, if you go down the rabbit hole of identity labels, then this bill fails to check off other groups with a stake. There is nobody representing law enforcement or search and rescue, representing guides or charter boats, representing active water sports, representing marine dealers or tourism, representing local governments, representing hunters (duck hunters use boats), and so on.

And the Division of State Lands and DEQ do not need to serve ex-officio on the Board. Why not ODFW? OSP? State Parks? This quickly gets very unwieldy and political influence sets in. It is not a good model for a volunteer citizen board.

Board members are vetted by the Governor's office and confirmed by the Oregon Senate. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Please leave identity politics out of the Marine Board. I would be happy to answer any questions.