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**Testimony by Travis Williams, Willamette Riverkeeper and Executive Director in support of  
HB 2695, a bill to Reform and Diversify the Membership of the Oregon State Marine Board**

**March 10, 2021**

**RE: HB 2695**

Chair Witt, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Hudson and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

For the record, my name is Travis Williams, Riverkeeper and Executive Director of the non-profit organization Willamette Riverkeeper. Since 1996, we have proudly served as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Willamette River. Together with thousands of Oregonians' support, our conservation and cleanup programs enable us to generate positive change for the Willamette River Basin. We support diversity and inclusion in our work to bring all Oregonians to the Willamette River to recreate, enjoy and protect our river.

We believe in a river with excellent water quality and abundant habitat, and safe for fishing and recreation. We believe this is a fundamental public right. Unfortunately, this right has been challenged by the policies of the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB), which has given more policy emphasis to promoting boat sales than to protecting the environmental health of Oregon's waterways.

During the 2019 Session of the Oregon Legislature, HB 2351 passed by a near-unanimous majority creating a duty of the OSMB to consider the environmental consequences of boating in Oregon when making state policy. Specifically, this bill tied recreational boating rules on the Willamette River to the environmental protection goals of the Willamette Greenway. This crucial new policy direction has been largely ignored by the Oregon State Marine Board and staff, choosing instead to continue using commercial rather than environmental and safety criteria.

Since the passage of HB 2351, the Board has held numerous board meetings, public meetings, and rules advisory committee meetings. Our representatives have attended these meetings, scoured meeting "board books", and watched or listened to countless hours of YouTube and Zoom videos. Since HB 2351 passed, the board has never meaningfully addressed

environmental consequences; clearly something more proactive must be done to obtain compliance with the law.

In addition, the OSMB has not taken property damage into account in the way that they should. Given the multiple ways in which docks, boats, shorelines and homes have been impacted, damage can be traced directly to wake surf and related boats. Unfortunately, the OSMB has not represented those who have paid literally tens of thousands of dollars individually to repair their docks and boathouses, boats and more. It is time to change this.

The current five-member Board clearly does not represent Oregon's Tribes, river residents, paddlers, people who fish, and those with specific scientific knowledge to promote stewardship of this vital resource. Passage of HB 2695 will enlarge the Board from five to seven members, designate board positions from these under-represented boating community, and add two ex-officio members from the Oregon Department of State Lands, which owns and manages the beds and banks of the state's navigable rivers, and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, which is tasked with protecting state water quality. The State representation in a non-voting mode can help the OSMB focus on environmental issues where needed.

HB 2695 is a major step forward to reforming an agency that for far too long has focused on promoting the commercial aspects of boating over the broader range of interests. Today, the OSMB does not properly incorporate the environmental, scientific, residential, recreational, and diversity needs in the current Board configuration. Frankly at times the appointments have made little sense, and have failed to take advantage of exceedingly high quality applicants. In our view it is time to improve the situation. It is time to engage a wider range of Oregonians to take part on the Oregon State Marine Board.

I appreciate your consideration of these comments, and feel that your committee can make a big difference in this issue.

Chair Witt and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, I urge you to forward HB 2695 to the House of Representatives with a DO PASS recommendation.

Thank you.

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