

Testimony of Bert Krages in Support of SB 5521

I am writing in support of the recommended budget for the Oregon State Marine Board. I am actively involved in the nonmotorized boating community and have a particular interest in safety and environmentally-responsible boating. Over the past few years, I have interacted with the Marine Board on a variety of issues. In doing so, I have found the agency to be well managed, staffed with competent and informed employees, and responsive to questions and concerns.

The Marine Board's responsibilities encompass many areas but one that I would like to address is boater safety. The increasing popularity of boating, particularly the nonmotorized kinds, has resulted in many people taking up the activity with little knowledge of important safety practices. For example, the prevalent lack of awareness of the danger of cold water results in fatalities almost every year during the spring months when air temperatures warm up before water temperatures do. For example, here is a photograph of someone in April 2021 paddling on 54°F water, with no life jacket, and 350 feet from the nearest shore.



Falling into cold water is dangerous because the sudden shock of cold water immersion can induce panic in response to the natural urge to get out of the water. Cold water immersion can also lead to incapacitation within a few minutes as the body decreases blood flow to the extremities in order to maintain its core temperature. Nonetheless, the paddler above seems to blissfully unaware of the danger.

In this regard, the proposal to hire boater safety advocates is a spectacular idea. Currently, most on-water safety outreach is conducted as an ancillary activity by the marine patrols, which are staffed by sheriff's deputies who are charged with other pressing responsibilities such as enforcement and rescue. Staffing issues have resulted in a reduction of the time that marine patrols are able to spend on the water, so putting trained safety advocates on the state's waters would address a definite need to deliver messaging about boater safety.

In summary, the Marine Board is an efficient agency with important missions and deserves to be fully funded as proposed in SB 5521.