



Good morning. Thank you so much for not only having me but for the clear and serious recognition you are giving to this very important bill. My name is Jess Lukas, and I am the Director of Aquatics for the Greater Burlington YMCA. I am here today in support of S. 326 the bill that *proposes to require all individuals on board a vessel between November 1<sup>st</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup> to wear a personal flotation device.* We don't talk about water safety the same way we instill in adults' car seat education. We don't talk about water safety in the same way we fit children for bicycle helmets and tell them why it's so important to wear them when riding. We don't talk about water safety in the same way we explain to look both ways before crossing the street. We don't talk about water safety.

“Drowning is a silent tragedy. Prevention of drowning is possible, but it requires time, coordinated effort, money, and state-level leadership” as stated in the 2022 Report of Water Safety in Vermont published by Safe Kids Vermont. What began as a collaborative partnership between the Vermont Child Fatality Review Team and Safe Kids Vermont has grown into the Water Safety Action Committee, which for the past 3 years has worked to identify reasons for the morbidity and mortality of children and adults from drowning and water recreational activities.

Vermont has limited state level legislation related to water safety. As a result, guidance often relies on local ordinances, insurance company mandates and/or personal choice. The Water Safety Action Committee works through a coordinated partnership that includes Safe Kids Vermont, Vermont Child Fatality Review Boards, the Greater Burlington YMCA, Live Like Benjo Foundation, Golisano Children's Hospital, Vermont Department of Health, University of Vermont Health Network, Vermont State Police Marine Division and Swim Like Annie, Inc. Together, we are working to reduce unintentional drowning deaths, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits across the state.

Our goal is simple: to prevent drowning in our communities. Vermont has 7,100 miles of rivers and streams, as well as 242,219 acres of lakes, reservoirs, ponds and 300,000 acres of freshwater wetlands. The moment the sun comes out, and air temperatures rise we are enjoying the outdoors! We do not come inside until the snow falls! Currently only children under the age of 13 are required to wear a life jacket when boats are underway. S. 326

proposes that for “Cold weather. On or before May 1<sup>st</sup> of each year and on or after November 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, all individuals aboard a vessel, while under way and the individual is on and open deck, shall wear a properly secured wearable US Coast Guard approved personal flotation device as intended by the manufacturer.” As a committee, cold-water life jacket legislation became a primary focus because of its attainability. There are zero reasons not to take this small step to protect on another. It is simple. It is effective. And it saves lives.

Cold water shock is a major factor in boating fatalities when water temperatures are less than 70 degree F. Cold water shock causes an involuntary gasp, often resulting in aspiration of water, hyperventilation, breathlessness and a reduced ability to control your breathing and swim. A life jacket greatly increases your chance for survival in cold water while also increasing the amount of time you to be rescued. A life jacket buys time. It keeps you afloat if you lose your sense of recognition of what to do next. When disorientation or panic takes over. In cold water – when the body and brain are no longer working together a life jacket can mean the difference between life and death. Life jackets are the extra layer of protection that could save a life.

In closing, as a representative of the Water Safety Action Committee, I believe safety is everyone’s responsibility. I support this bill because we want everyone to get home safely – each and every day.