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Agency of Human Services

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Committee on Transportation

FROM: Vermont Department of Health

DATE: February 17, 2026

SUBJECT: Support of S. 172, Personal Flotation Devices in Cold Weather

The Vermont Department of Health participates in the Safe Kids Vermont Water Safety Action Committee and conducts work to develop and disseminate evidence-based public health messaging to prevent drowning and promote water safety.

According to Vermont Vital Records, from 2019 to 2023, 75% of recreational-boating related fatalities in Vermont had no mention of a life jacket or personal floatation device in the incident injury description.(1) The Vermont Department of Health Expanding and Refining Recreational Boating Safety Data in Vermont 2019-2023 Pilot Data Report identified those who do not wear a life jacket as individuals experiencing a higher prevalence of boating related fatalities and suggests the importance of wearing a life jacket to reduce the number of deaths.(2) Cold water immersion can quickly result in loss of swimming function and a life jacket requirement during the cold water months of November 1st through April 30th will prevent drowning by keeping incapacitated individuals afloat. The American Academy of Pediatrics Prevention of Drowning technical report found that life jacket legislation can lead to 90-95% compliance in specific water user groups including children and those operating personal watercrafts.(3)

The Department supports S.172 as this bill protects the lives of Vermonters enjoying water recreation during the colder months and improves safety on Vermont's lakes and rivers.

References

1. Data Source: Vermont Vital Records.
2. Vermont Department of Health. Expanding and Refining Recreational Boating Safety Data in Vermont 2019-2023 Pilot Data Report.
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/document/hsirecreationalboating-2025.pdf>
3. Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. 2021. Prevention of Drowning. *Pediatrics*, 148(2), e2021052227.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-052227>

