



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

February 27, 2025

The Honorable David A. Bennett
Chairman
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 5341 An Act Relating to Waters and Navigation – Regulation of Boats – Freshwater Lake Management Program

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 5341, which would establish a new fee to provide funding for lake management activities. DEM is not commenting on the underlying concept of this legislation, but we have concerns with the way that it is drafted.

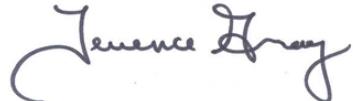
H 5341 proposes to require that motorboat owners pay a \$5.00 biennial fee when registering their vessel with DEM (or a \$2.50 fee if registering their motorboat on an annual basis) to be deposited in a new restricted receipt account also created by the legislation. Any funds deposited in the account could be used for the purposes of the Freshwater Lake Management Program established under R.I. Gen. Laws § 46-33. Those purposes include DEM activities related to lake management such as field surveys and mapping to document the presence of aquatic invasive species in freshwaters, development of guidance and technical assistance to lake associations and other private entities, and the provision of lake management grants for projects carried out by eligible entities such as lake associations and municipalities.

In recent years, states attempting to assess additional fees in conjunction with their boating registration program have been found by the U.S. Coast Guard to be non-compliant with federal law. DEM's concern with H 5341 is that tying the fee to the boating registration process could result in a similar finding of non-compliance and jeopardize federal funding provided to the state. Other states, including [Connecticut](#), have circumvented this restriction by creating an entirely separate sticker or stamp with an associated fee that boaters must obtain. It is also DEM's understanding that federal legislation was introduced in the previous Congress seeking to

address this issue by allowing states to collect fees in conjunction with their boating registration fees.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Ryan Mulcahey, DEM Director of Legislative Affairs, at ryan.mulcahey@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terrence Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Terrence" on the top line and "Gray" on the bottom line.

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
The Honorable Michael Chippendale
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director