

**ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT**

**TESTIMONY ON 25-H 6063,  
RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- PERSONAL WATERCRAFT  
SAFETY ACT  
March 25, 2025**

This bill would reduce most personal watercraft violations from a misdemeanor to a civil violation.

Currently, certain minor behaviors and actions, like operating a personal watercraft at any time between the hours of one-half hour after sunset until one-half hour before sunrise, constitute grounds for a misdemeanor offense. Say a group of avid recreational fishers decided to leave earlier than normal one morning to get the best fishing day possible, and left the shore forty-five minutes before sunrise. The operator of the personal craft could be subject to a misdemeanor offense. Similarly, of that same group of people, if one passenger decided not to wear their life vest, this inaction could cause the driver of the personal watercraft to be subject to a misdemeanor offense.

Seven years ago, the ACLU of Rhode Island issued two reports examining what we call the “Statehouse to Prison Pipeline,”<sup>1</sup> the pervasiveness of the passage of laws creating new crimes and increasing criminal penalties for various existing offenses, helping fuel the twin problems of overcriminalization and mass incarceration. While bills increasing sentences get a lot of attention every session, very few bills attempt to go the other way. We therefore support the introduction of bills like this one which reexamine the criminal nature of certain types of minor misconduct and call for their decriminalization.

For these reasons, the ACLU of RI supports this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> For the first report, see “The Statehouse-to-Prison Pipeline,” January 2018, <https://www.riaclu.org/en/publications/report-statehouse-prison-pipeline-january-2018>