



RHODE ISLAND

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

March 25, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 6063 An Act Relating to Waters and Navigation – Personal Watercraft Safety Act

Dear Chairman Craven,

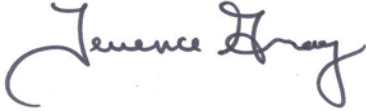
Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to offer comments on H 6063, which would modify the penalties associated with violations of the Personal Watercraft Safety Act (the “Act”).

The Act regulates the use of personal watercraft, also known as Jet Skis, in Rhode Island waters and is enforced by DEM along with local police departments and harbormasters. Currently, all violations of the Act are punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500 or imprisonment not to exceed six months and are adjudicated in District Court. H 6063 proposes to bifurcate the violations in the Act such that all but two violations would be adjudicated before the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal (RITT) and be subject to a \$250 civil penalty per violation, as opposed to the current civil penalty of \$100 per violation for other boating violations adjudicated before the RITT. The violations that would remain under the jurisdiction of the District Court include failure to operate a personal watercraft in a reasonable and prudent manner and operating a personal watercraft in a reckless manner so as to endanger the life, limb, or property of another. The legislation proposes that these two violations remain subject to the existing penalties and adds new language authorizing the court to suspend the privilege to operate a personal watercraft for up to six months for each violation.

DEM supports transferring jurisdiction over violations of the Act to the RITT. Presently, state law provides the RITT with jurisdiction over other types of recreational boating violations (see R.I. Gen. Laws § 46-22-19) and we believe that transferring violations of the Act to the RITT is consistent with this practice. However, we recommend that the \$250 civil penalty for most violations of the Act proposed by the legislation be amended to a \$100 civil penalty to be consistent with the penalties in law for most other types of boating safety violations. Although personal watercraft are regulated under a separate chapter of law from motorboats and other vessels, DEM prefers to see a consistent set of penalties for violations regardless of the type of watercraft involved.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to work with you to address the issues raised in this letter. 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 dark ink, appearing to read "Terrence Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Terrence" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Gray".

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Jon D. Brien
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director