

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**In Opposition to L.D. 339**

**An Act To Prohibit Unattended Watercraft on Open Water**

**SPONSORED BY: Representative FAY of Raymond.**

Cosponsored by Representatives: CARNEY of Cape Elizabeth, MASTRACCIO of Sanford, McCREIGHT of Harpswell, RISEMAN of Harrison, SKOLFIELD of Weld, Senator: LUCHINI of Hancock.

**DATE OF HEARING: February 20, 2019.**

Good afternoon Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Tim Peabody, Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 339**.

This bill makes a person's leaving a watercraft unattended in open water a civil violation.

The Department opposes this bill as it creates a law enforcement requirement to remedy a problem that may be more effectively addressed with increased education.

Warden Service and other first responders respond to calls each year about unoccupied watercraft that have gone adrift and time is spent determining whether someone is in distress or has gone overboard when often the watercraft simply floated away from a shore or a dock. Many of these calls result in an unnecessary search and rescue mission. Labeling watercraft, particularly unregistered and nonmotorized watercraft in a manner that the owner could be notified in the event the watercraft was found floating without a person in it, would remedy much of the problem but we don't support mandating this proposal in law. Instead, we suggest that there be a stronger emphasis on education with regard to labeling a watercraft with the owner's contact information. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary has a program in place called Operation Paddle Smart that provides, to the public, waterproof stickers that act as identification cards and a person can write their contact information on it so the rightful owner can be contacted if it is located by someone else.

From the USCG website:

*"The Paddle Smart weather-proof sticker, when properly filled out using a permanent waterproof marker & appropriately applied to small craft by vessel owners, can help: save lives, recover missing property, reduce resources expended on non-emergency SAR activities related to unnecessarily deploying limited resources to search for someone who is not in danger saving*

*tax payer dollars, sparing rescue crews from being unnecessarily put at risk or family / friends pointless anxiety. Each Paddle Smart sticker provides a place for small craft owner's to display their name, phone & cell phone numbers. It is important to put two valid phone numbers on sticker, since a cell phone could become non-functional if it ends up in the water. Under such circumstances, an alternate number provides a way to check if an emergency exists or to arrange for return of property to its owner. Timely access to this information is critical during the initial SAR investigation phase if the craft is found a drift."*

We would urge you to consider education as an alternative to this bill.

I would be happy to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.