



Representative Alan Austerman House Majority Leader

Alaska State Legislature

Sponsor Statement for House Bill 301: An act amending the termination date of the statewide boating safety and education program

House Bill 301 repeals the sunset dates of the Statewide Boating Safety and Education Program. Through this program the State of Alaska works in close cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, and other partners to provide national award winning programs such as the popular *Kids Don't Float* life jacket loaner program, nationally approved boating courses, instructor training, video production, and numerous publications and instructor tools. Alaska's non-commercial boating fatalities have dropped more than 20% since state efforts began, and at least **19** Alaskan children are alive today thanks to a *Kids Don't Float* life jacket. The program has been repeatedly recognized for excellence, including the U.S. Coast Guard's Meritorious Public Service Award.

Between 1987 and 2000 Alaska was the only state without a comprehensive recreational boating safety program, even though Alaska had one of the highest fatality rates in the nation. During the same time, Alaska's share of the federal funding available to the states for boating safety programs was being distributed to the others states. Following 11 attempts at passage, in May of 2000, HB 108, the *Alaska Boating Safety Act* (AS 05.25) was signed into law.

The Act did four things:

1. It brought Alaska's state boating laws into uniformity with federal laws.
2. It assigned the state's boating regulatory functions to appropriate state agencies (DNR as the lead agency, DPS for law enforcement and DMV for boat registration).
3. It qualified Alaska to receive the state's share of federal grant funds.
4. It established Alaska's boating education program.

The 21st Legislature originally added two 'sunset' provisions to repeal the *Alaska Boating Safety Act* in the event the state did not receive the anticipated federal funds. The first sunset would take effect and the Boating Safety program would terminate if federal funds were not appropriated. The second sunset terminated the program by date, currently July 1, 2013.

The program's efforts have proved to significantly reduce Alaska's boating fatality rate and the sunset provisions of the *Alaska Boating Safety Act* should be repealed on the merit of its success.