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GOVERNOR O'MALLEY ANNOUNCES PUSH FOR STRONGER LIFE PRESERVER LAW

DNR to Submit Legislation to Raise Age Requirements for Children

Annapolis, MD (Wednesday, September 23, 2009) — Governor Martin O'Malley today announced he will direct the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to draft a bill for the 2010 General Assembly to increase the age at which children are required to wear life preservers. Under the new legislation, any child under the age of 13 would be required to wear a personal flotation device (PFD); the current age is 7.

"While we are truly blessed to be able to enjoy all that Maryland's vast network of waterways offers, even one boating related death is one too many," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "Raising the age at which a child is required to wear a life vest is paramount to ensuring the safety of our children out on the water."

Current law states any child under the age of seven must wear a PFD on a recreational boat 21 feet or smaller, unless the boat is moored or anchored or the child is below deck in an enclosed cabin. If the General Assembly passes the new legislation, the age would be raised from 7 to 13 starting July 10, 2010.

"Despite increased outreach, education and enforcement, Maryland has had 15 boating related drownings since January – including an 11-year old girl," said DNR Secretary John Griffin. "This is beyond alarming; it is unacceptable, and we are committed to doing everything we can to keep our boaters – and our children – safe."

The State averages 12 boating related fatalities a year.

"Eighty percent of all boating related deaths can be prevented with a life vest," said NRP Superintendent Colonel George Johnson. "It is our hope that legislation will not only increase the number of Maryland children wearing PFDs but also help increase awareness about the importance of life vests."

Raising the age requirement will put Maryland in line with federal regulations and 34 states, including Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Washington, DC. The federal regulations do not supersede the state, but the National Transportation Board strongly encourages states to update their PFD requirements.

"Life vests save lives," said State Boat Act Advisory Committee Chairman Dan Jarzynski. "Our Committee unanimously supports this legislation and urges its passage this upcoming legislative session."

Maryland law also states that anyone born on or after July 1, 1972 must have a Certificate of Boating Safety Education in order to operate a mechanically propelled vessel on Maryland waters. NRP offers

both in-person and on-line boating safety courses to receive that certificate. For more information go to <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/safety/basiccourse.html>

DNR will draft the legislation, which will be endorsed by the Administration and presented to the 2010 General Assembly in when it reconvenes in January.

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The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary, is the state agency responsible for providing natural and living resource-related services to citizens and visitors. DNR manages more than 467,000 acres of public lands and 17,000 miles of waterways, along with Maryland's forests, fisheries, and wildlife for maximum environmental, economic and quality of life benefits. A national leader in land conservation, DNR-managed parks and natural, historic, and cultural resources attract 12 million visitors annually. DNR is the lead agency in Maryland's effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay, the state's number one environmental priority. Learn more at www.DNR.Maryland.gov.