

- 6) Exempts undocumented vessels from DMV registration if the vessel is registered by the federal government or a federally approved registration system of another state.
- 7) Prohibits a court from staying, suspending, or entertaining dismissal of the proceedings of a case in which a person is charged with operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs, for attendance or participation in any education, training, or treatment programs.

This bill:

- 1) Authorizes a peace officer to prepare a written notice to appear when the officer has reasonable cause to believe that a person involved in a traffic accident has violated boating law and that the violation was a factor in the occurrence of the vessel accident.
- 2) Makes the failure of a vessel to display a ski flag to indicate a swimmer in the vicinity of the vessel an infraction punishable by a fine not exceeding \$15.
- 3) Defines a “for-hire vessel” as any vessel propelled by machinery carrying one or more passengers for hire.
- 4) Requires on or after July 1, 2027, every vessel using the water or on the waters of California to be registered with the state, to the extent permissible under federal law. Further requires the owner of a vessel to obtain a registration sticker from DMV and properly display it on the vessel, as specified.
- 5) Prohibits a court from staying, suspending, or entertaining dismissal of the proceedings of a case in which a person is charged with operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs, for attendance or participation in any education, training, or treatment programs.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, "AB 2055 is an important vessel safety measure that seeks to update existing laws on vessel operation, harmonize related provisions of state and federal law, and conform California laws on vehicle and vessel operation. It is vital that statutes are constantly reviewed so that evolving practices can be reflected. It's also important to resolve differences between state and federal law that cause confusion. The Harbors and Navigation Code addresses issues that mirror those handled in the

Vehicle Code but not always in the same fashion. The common thread for the provision in this bill is the safe and legal operation of vessels.”

- 2) This bill proposes to make a number of changes to existing boating laws, including:
 - a) *Ski flag law*. Under existing Harbors and Navigation Code, boat operators are required to display an orange or red ski flag under specific conditions to alert nearby vessels that a skier is in the water, signaling them to proceed with caution. However, on lakes and waterways throughout California many recreational boaters frequently stop their vessels to swim. Despite the similar safety risks posed by swimmers in the water, the law does not currently require the display of a ski flag in these situations. In fact, the California Code of Regulations prohibits displaying a ski flag at any time other than when a skier is down or preparing to ski. As a result, it is technically unlawful to display a ski flag to warn of swimmers in the water, even when doing so would enhance safety. This bill extends the “ski flag” requirement to apply to when a swimmer is in the water.
 - b) *For-hire vessels*. Under existing Harbors and Navigation Code, California defines a “for-hire vessel” as any vessel propelled by machinery carrying more than three passengers for hire. This definition conflicts with federal standards established by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), which require that a licensed captain operate any vessel carrying even one passenger for hire. This bill updates the definition to be consistent with the federal standards established by USCG.
 - c) *Vessel registration*. In California, vessels are registered in one of two ways: through USCG and referred to as a documented vessel or through the State of California and referred to as an undocumented vessel. Over the past several years, due to privacy restrictions and other factors, law enforcement entities cannot readily access necessary documented vessel information held by federal agencies. As a result, law enforcement entities have no quick or dependable way to access documented vessel information. This bill updates provisions relating to vessel registration to clarify that every vessel must be registered with the state.
 - d) *Boating under the influence*. Existing law prohibits operating a vessel, water skis, aquaplane, or similar device while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, drug, or combination of alcohol and drugs. When a person is charged with driving under the influence (DUI) for a violation of the Vehicle Code, the court is prohibited from suspending or staying the proceeding, or

considering dismissal or entertaining dismissal, for the purpose of allowing the defendant to participate in an education, training, or treatment program. This bill would apply similar DUI-related prohibitions to boating under the influence.

3) *Double referral.* This bill was double referred to the Senate Public Safety Committee, where is passed on a vote of 6-0 at their June 9, 2026, hearing.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 25, 2026.)

SUPPORT:

California State Sheriffs' Association (sponsor)
San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
The California Baptist Capitol Ministry

OPPOSITION:

None received

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