

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 2055 (Jeff Gonzalez)

As Amended August 13, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Changes registration and operation specifications of vessels and expands the scope of certain vessel-related penalties.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Exclude the following from the infraction for failure to display a ski flag:
 - a) Public safety activities;
 - b) A performer engaged in a professional exhibition;
 - c) A person engaged in a regatta, vessel or water ski race or competition, or other marine event authorized pursuant to Section 268 of the Harbors and Navigation Code.
- 2) State that on and after January 1, 2028, and to the extent permissible under federal law, every recreational vessel using the water or on the waters of this state shall be registered pursuant to Chapter 2 of Division 3.5 of the Vehicle Code.
- 3) State that the following shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2034, and as of that date is repealed.
- 4) Require the owner of a vessel that is required to or that has a valid marine document issued by a federal agency shall obtain from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) a decal and shall display the decal on the vessel, either within 18 inches of the normal boarding area or the mast. The owner shall apply for the decal if the vessel remains in California waters for more than 60 days and shall display the decal if the vessel remains in California waters for more than 90 days. The decal shall be visible regardless of whether doors and hatches are open or closed.
 - a) The DMV shall not issue a decal to an owner of a vessel described above that is larger than a registration sticker issued to an undocumented vessel
- 5) State that a decal issued pursuant to this subdivision is not a form of registration. The decal does not create a second title or affect a title. Issuance of the decal does not affect lien proceedings.
- 6) Define the following for purposes of the above:
 - a) "Recreational vessel" means a vessel that is being used only for pleasure and that is less than 70 feet in length;
 - b) "Vessel" has the meaning set forth in Section 760 of the Harbors and Navigation Code.
- 7) State that the following shall become operative on January 1, 2034.

- 8) Every undocumented vessel using the waters or on the waters of this state shall be currently numbered. A person shall not operate, and a county, city, or political subdivision shall not give permission for the operation of, an undocumented vessel on those waters unless the undocumented vessel is numbered in accordance with this chapter, or an applicable federal law, or a federally approved numbering system of another state, and unless both of the following are met:
- a) The certificate of number issued to that undocumented vessel is in full force and effect.
 - b) The identifying number set forth in the certificate of number is displayed on each side of the bow of the undocumented vessel for which the identifying number was issued.

COMMENTS

Citation authority. Under current law (California Vehicle Code (VEH) 40600), a peace officer may cite a person for violating the Vehicle Code when the peace officer has reasonable cause to believe that the person involved in a traffic accident has violated a provision of the Vehicle Code not declared to be a felony or a local ordinance and the violation was a factor in the occurrence of the traffic accident. There is no analogous provision for boaters involved in vessel accidents. This bill would provide the same authority for peace officers to prepare a written notice to appear for a person operating a vessel.

Ski flag law. Under Harbors and Navigation Code Section 658.7, 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. Title 14, Section 7009(d) of 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.

For-hire vessels. Under Harbors and Navigation Code Section 760, 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. The change in "for-hire vessel" definition would ensure additional safety requirements for vessels on California waters.

Vessel registration. In California, vessels are registered in one of two ways: through the USCG and referred to as a documented vessel or through the State of California and referred to as an undocumented vessel. Approximately six years ago, state and local peace officers could easily obtain ownership or registration information for recreational documented vessels (registered through the USCG) by running a query through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, the Maritime Documentation Center, or similar databases. That is no longer the case. Due to privacy restrictions and other factors, deputies and boating officers today cannot access documented vessel information through the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS). They cannot determine whether a vessel has current registration, whether it is stolen, or who the registered owner is.

This leaves most state and local peace officers without a reliable method of quickly obtaining critical information during boating accidents, criminal investigations, enforcement stops, or similar incidents. A local USCG Sector has indicated that officers may call to request information on documented vessels. However, this process is inconsistent, requests may be denied due to verification issues or the volume of repeated inquiries. This process takes a phone call and still may not be approved. As a result, most state and local peace officers have no quick or dependable way to access documented vessel information.

Boating under the influence. The provision in this bill relating to boating under the influence is not under the jurisdiction of this committee. This bill is double referred to the Assembly Public Safety Committee and will be heard in that committee as it relates to their jurisdiction.

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."

Arguments in Support

The California State Sherriff's association, sponsors of this bill write: "On behalf of the California State Sheriffs' Association (CSSA), we are pleased to sponsor Assembly Bill 2055, which would address gaps in enforcement authority, modernize outdated provisions, and strengthen public safety on California waterways. This bill would enact five provisions [...] AB 2055 harmonizes the Harbors and Navigation Code and the Vehicle Code to provide for similar limitations on pretrial diversion and sentencing conformity [...] AB 2055 provides this authority to allow a citation, including in circumstances when the violation is not committed in the officer's presence [...] AB 2055 adopts the Coast Guard standards specifying that a vessel only needs to carry one or more passengers to be considered a for-hire vessel [...] AB 2055 amends the Ski Flag Law to require the display of a ski flag when there is one or more swimmers in the vicinity of the vessel [...] California should adopt a model similar to Washington State that requires all USCG-documented vessels to also be registered with the state. These vessels are not state-titled but must display a state registration tab, pay minimal registration fees, and are entered into the state system—allowing law enforcement to query them through CLETS."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

"Workload increase of \$175,000 annually to the Department of Parks and Recreation Division of Boating and Waterways resulting from the change in the definition of a for-hire vessel from more than three to one or more (Harbors and Watercraft Revolving Fund).

"Minor, absorbable costs to the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST). It is the responsibility of the local agency to ensure that their course is POST certified.

"The Department of Motor Vehicles would have absorbable costs associated with requiring every vessel using the water or on the waters of California be registered with the state, to the extent permissible under federal law."

VOTES:**ASM TRANSPORTATION: 16-0-0**

YES: Wilson, Davies, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Carrillo, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Jackson, Lackey, Macedo, Papan, Ransom, Rogers, Sharp-Collins, Ward

ASM PUBLIC SAFETY: 9-0-0

YES: Schultz, Alanis, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Lackey, Nguyen, Ramos, Sharp-Collins

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Bauer-Kahan, Calderon, Caloza, Ellis, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 69-0-11

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Calderon, DeMaio, Dixon, Gallagher, Lee, Quirk-Silva, Celeste Rodriguez, Sanchez, Stefani, Ta, Wicks

UPDATED

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