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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

JOINT RESOLUTION

URGING THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
TO STUDY AND REGULATE THE IMPACT OF WAKE BOATS ON RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC WATERWAYS

Introduced By: Representatives Chippendale, Place, Santucci, Cotter, Handy, Carson,
Tanzi, Noret, Bennett, and Edwards

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

1 WHEREAS, Rhode Island is home to at least 237 freshwater lakes, ponds, and reservoirs
2 covering approximately 18,845 acres, many of which serve as drinking water sources, wildlife
3 habitats, flood control resources, and vital recreational areas for residents and visitors; and

4 WHEREAS, Approximately seventy percent of Rhode Island's lakes are fifty acres or
5 less in size, and only four exceed five hundred acres, making the vast majority of the State's
6 freshwater bodies small and particularly vulnerable to environmental disturbance; and

7 WHEREAS, Wake boats are specialized motorized vessels intentionally designed to
8 generate large, powerful waves through the use of deep V-shaped hulls, hydrofoil devices, and
9 ballast systems that may add between 2,000 and 6,000 pounds of additional weight; and

10 WHEREAS, Scientific research has documented that wake boats can produce waves two
11 to three times higher, generate three to nine times more wave energy, and in some studies up to
12 seventeen times the energy of comparable recreational powerboats; and

13 WHEREAS, Wake boat propellers and ballast-enhanced displacement have been shown
14 to resuspend bottom sediments in water up to thirty-three feet deep, disturbing previously
15 sequestered nutrients and contaminants; and

16 WHEREAS, Sediment resuspension releases nitrogen, phosphorus, and other stored
17 nutrients into the water column, accelerating algae growth, contributing to harmful and toxic
18 cyanobacteria blooms, reducing dissolved oxygen, impairing fish and aquatic habitats, and
19 increasing the frequency of no-contact advisories issued to protect public health; and

1 WHEREAS, Increased turbidity from sediment disturbance reduces light penetration,
2 limits photosynthesis, degrades aquatic vegetation, and disrupts the ecological balance necessary
3 to sustain Rhode Island’s freshwater ecosystems; and

4 WHEREAS, The powerful wakes generated by wake boats have been documented to
5 require between 400 and 1,023 feet to dissipate to levels comparable to conventional vessels,
6 thereby increasing shoreline erosion, degrading fish habitat, damaging infrastructure, and
7 imposing financial burdens on riparian property owners; and

8 WHEREAS, Shoreline hardening undertaken in response to wake-induced erosion often
9 further degrades natural habitats, reduces biodiversity, increases stormwater runoff, and
10 exacerbates water quality decline; and

11 WHEREAS, Wake boats may retain significant quantities of water in ballast tanks and
12 bilge compartments even after drainage, increasing the risk of transporting aquatic invasive
13 species and pathogens between Rhode Island waterbodies; and

14 WHEREAS, The increased wave energy generated by wake boats presents heightened
15 safety risks to swimmers, kayakers, paddleboarders, anglers, and operators of smaller watercraft;
16 and

17 WHEREAS, Several states, including neighboring New England states, have enacted
18 legislation establishing minimum lake size requirements, minimum water depth standards, and
19 minimum setback distances from shorelines and structures for wake boat operation in order to
20 protect environmental quality and public safety; and

21 WHEREAS, These regulatory frameworks seek to balance recreational boating with the
22 protection of fragile freshwater ecosystems, particularly on smaller lakes that are uniquely
23 susceptible to sediment disturbance, nutrient loading, and shoreline erosion; and

24 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management is charged
25 with protecting the State’s natural resources and has the scientific expertise necessary to evaluate
26 the environmental, ecological, and public safety impacts associated with wake boat operation;
27 now, therefore be it

28 RESOLVED, That this General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island hereby urges the
29 Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to expeditiously conduct a
30 comprehensive scientific study on the environmental, ecological, shoreline, water quality,
31 invasive species, and public safety impacts of wake boat operation on Rhode Island’s freshwater
32 lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; and be it further

33 RESOLVED, That such study shall include, but not be limited to, analysis of lake size,
34 depth, shoreline characteristics, sediment composition, nutrient loading, and proximity to

1 sensitive habitats, as well as a review of regulatory models adopted by other New England states;
2 and be it further

3 RESOLVED, That the Department of Environmental Management is further urged to
4 develop and promulgate regulations establishing appropriate limits, prohibitions, minimum depth
5 requirements, minimum shoreline setback distances, and a clear regulatory framework governing
6 the locations and manner in which wake boats may operate within the State of Rhode Island; and
7 be it further

8 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
9 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Director of the Rhode Island Department of
10 Environmental Management.

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