

Press Release

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Federal Pool Safety Legislation Passes House of Representatives

Bill seeks to end hundreds of children's accidental drowning

(Washington, DC) - Legislation that seeks to end hundreds of preventable childhood deaths each year passed the House of Representatives today by a voice vote. The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act, H.R. 1721, will provide incentive grants to states that pass legislation implementing layers of protection to help prevent childhood drowning, the second leading cause of accidental death among children ages one to

fourteen years old.

“Since before I was elected to Congress, developing national comprehensive pool and spa safety legislation has been one of my top priorities,” said Rep. Wasserman Schultz. “335 children died in the United States in 2004 and basic pool safety legislation would have dramatically reduced those childhood fatalities.”

“This is a strong bill that will help improve product safety standards and consumer education efforts,” said Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce (MI-15). “Debbie has demonstrated tremendous leadership in crafting this legislation. As a result of her efforts American children will be safer.”

The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act uses as a model existing Florida pool safety legislation, the "Preston de Ibern/McKenzie Merriam Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act," that U.S. Rep. Wasserman Schultz introduced and passed in 2000 while serving as a Representative in the Florida State Legislature.

"The tragedy of hundreds of children dying each year from accidental drowning and four times as many who are near-drowning victims with devastating injuries, is made even more painful by the knowledge that these types of accidents are preventable," said Rep. Wasserman Schultz. "We must implement national standards to replace the haphazard safety measures that allowed Graeme, and hundreds of children like her, to be lost in such nightmare scenarios."

The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act is intended to increase the safety of swimming pools and spas by motivating states to pass laws that incorporate layers of protection in order to help prevent drowning, drain entrapment and hair entanglements. The legislation would provide grants to states which require all swimming pools and spas to have these layers of protection:

1. Installation of physical barriers (such as a fence) around a pool to prevent children's unattended access.

2. Mandates pools to be equipped with a suction outlet drain cover which prevents hair and body entanglement.
3. Requires the installation of a safety vacuum release system, shutting off a pump if it detects a blockage.
4. Public awareness campaign regarding the importance of active supervision of children at or near a pool or spa.

The legislation authorizes the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) with an authorization of \$10 million to help end accidental drowning. Five million dollars will fund an incentive grant program for states that enact pool safety laws and five million dollars will create an educational outreach program for pool and spa owners, professionals, businesses and municipalities to inform people of the danger of accidental drowning associated with pools and spas, and how these dangers can be alleviated.

“One drain entrapment is one too many,” said Rep. Jim Ramstad (MN-03). “One precious little eight year old girl losing part of her small intestine is too much suffering to comprehend. It is time to take action to insure our children are protected.”

Companion legislation in the Senate, introduced by Senator Pryor (AR) has passed out of committee and is awaiting a vote of the full Senate.
