

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Chair

AB 1056 (Davies) – As Amended March 30, 2023

SUBJECT: Department of Parks and Recreation: California Youth Water Safety State Grant

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to establish and administer the California Youth Water Safety State Grant. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires DPR to make California Youth Water Safety State Grant funding available to nonprofit organizations, special districts, and a city or county parks and recreation department to provide free swimming lessons for low-income and at-risk youth.
- 2) Limits the applicant to apply on an annual basis and prevents DPR from awarding a grant larger than \$25,000 per applicant.
- 3) Allows DPR to use up to 5% of the appropriated moneys for the purpose of administering the program.
- 4) Makes implementation of this bill contingent upon an appropriation from the annual budget.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW), in cooperation with the State Department of Education and other appropriate entities involved with water safety, to develop an aquatic safety program to be made available for use at an appropriate grade level in public elementary schools at no expense to the schools (Education Code § 51879.7–51879.7)
- 2) Establishes the states commitment to ensure all California’s can benefit from, and have meaningful and sustainable access to, the state’s rich cultural and natural resources [(Public Resource Code (PRC) § 1000–1003)].
- 3) Requires the director of DPR to establish the Outdoor Equity Grants Program to increase the ability of underserved and at-risk populations to participate in outdoor environmental educational experiences at state parks and other public lands where outdoor environmental education programs take place, among other requirements (PRC § 5090.75).

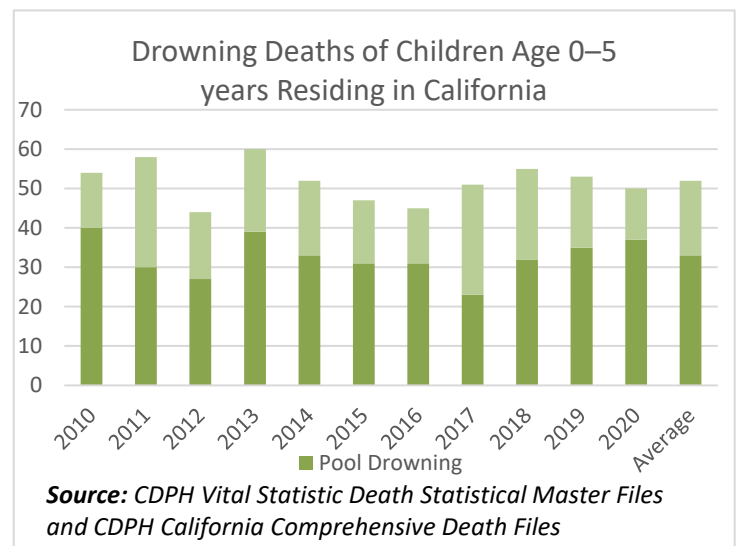
FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill requires that DPR establish and administer the California Youth Water Safety State Grant that would provide free swimming lessons for low-income

and at-risk youth. According to the author, “California is blessed to be located next to the beautiful coastline. Open access to our beaches, lakes and rivers is why so many come to live and raise a family in our state. However, while these natural features are breathtaking, they can also be dangerous if individuals are not properly trained on how to swim or tread water. [This bill] is a common-sense measure to create a state grant to help local entities put on free clinics for those most at risk.”

- 2) **Background.** According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, drowning deaths are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for children aged 0 to 17 years and the leading cause for those aged 1 to 4 years. According to the California Department of Developmental Services, in California, drowning is a leading cause of injury-related deaths among children under the age of five (see adjacent chart).¹



From 1999 to 2019, the rate of unintentional drowning deaths among children aged 0 to 17 years declined 38%. For the same period, unintentional drowning death rates were higher for children in rural counties compared with urban counties and unintentional drowning death rates were higher for non-Hispanic-black children compared with non-Hispanic-white and Hispanic children.² The data show that disparities were greatest in swimming pools, with swimming pool drowning rates among black children aged 5 to 19 years 5.5 times higher than those among white children in the same age group. This disparity was greatest at ages 11 to 12 years; at these ages, black children drown in swimming pools at 10 times the rate of white children.³

Benefits of swimming lessons. Anecdotally, swimming lessons greatly reduce the risk of drowning for children. There is, however, little published evidence. A study conducted by the National Institute of Health reveals that participating in formal swimming lessons is associated with an 88% reduction in drowning risk in children aged 1 to 4 years, although the authors of the study indicate that estimates are imprecise. However, swimming lessons can teach children to respect the water, which makes them less likely to get themselves into dangerous swimming situations; teach children safe swimming skills, which may one day save their life; and encourage parents to actively engage with their children during water related and swimming activities.

¹ [Drowning Prevention. Department of Developmental Service.](#)

² Spencer, M. R. *et al.* Unintentional Drowning Deaths Among Children Aged 0–17 Years: United States, 1999–2019. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021)

³ Gilchrist, J. Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Fatal Unintentional Drowning Among Persons Aged ≤29 Years — United States, 1999–2010. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014)

Unfortunately, swimming lesson may be inaccessible and cost prohibitive for some families, especially families with multiple children.

Operation Splash. To promote water safety and encourage exercise, Kaiser Permanente partners with cities in Southern California to offer Operation Splash, which provides free swimming lessons for low-income youth and adults and free junior lifeguard training. In the City of Los Angeles, Operation Splash enables city pools to stay open past the prime summer swim months to provide more exercise and recreational opportunities for adults and children. For 2017–2018, Kaiser Permanente awarded a \$408,000 grant to the City of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation for Operation Splash, which would provide swimming lessons for about 12,000 children and adults and provide junior lifeguard scholarships for 1,560 youth.

USA Swimming Foundation. In February 2022, the USA Swimming Foundation awarded \$898,184 to swim programs for both adults and children across the country through its 2022 grant program. The Swimming Foundation estimates that the \$763,184 in funding would provide an estimated 19,870 children the opportunity to swim (around \$38 per individual). Of the 141 programs that were awarded funding, ten were awarded to programs in California (seven for youth swim programs and three for adult swim programs).

- 3) **Policy considerations.** This bill limits the grants to \$25,000 per applicant. The limit for the USA Swimming Foundation grant is \$5,000 per applicant. Based on the estimated number of individuals served by the Swimming Foundations grants, \$25,000 could provide lessons for around 650 participants. Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation received over \$400,000 to provide swimming lessons and training for two years from Kaiser Permanente. Depending on the scope of the organization that applies for the grant, the funding cap proposed by this bill may not be sufficient to cover the cost of the entire program and limit the number of participants.

As this bill progresses, they authors may which to clarify the definition of “at-risk” and “low-income” to ensure funds are granted appropriately.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The California Special Districts Association writes in support of the bill for “make funding available to non-profit organizations, special districts, and city or county parks and recreation departments to provide free swimming lessons for low-income and at-risk youth.”
- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 1445 (Arambula) of this Legislative session, would authorize specified organizations to provide informational materials, in electronic or hard copy form, to a public elementary school regarding specified topics relating to drowning prevention. AB 1445 is substantially similar to AB 2650 (2022) by the same author, which died in the Assembly Education Committee without a hearing. AB 1445 has been referred to the Assembly Education Committee and is not yet set for hearing.

AB 768 (Holden) of 2021 would have required that DBW and the State Department of Public Health, in cooperation with other specified entities, develop an aquatic and pool safety

program to be made available for use by local education agencies at no expense. AB 768 died in the Assembly Education Committee without a hearing.

SB 217 (Portantino) of 2019 would have established various requirements for organized and recreational camps to comply with including for swimming and aquatic activities. SB 217 was held in the Senate Health Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Special Districts Association

Opposition

None on file

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