

Great Lakes & Mid-Atlantic

Injury & Violence Prevention Legislative Narrative Addendum

Drowning Prevention

Prepared by Doyle Strategies LLC to accompany the [GLMA Injury & Violence Prevention Legislative Scan](#) and [Narrative](#). Reviewed as of April 2026.

Drowning Prevention

Across the 12 jurisdictions reviewed, drowning prevention is usually addressed through two statewide policy channels: (1) public-pool or public-bathing-place regulation and (2) boating laws on life jackets, required safety equipment, and operator education. I did not identify a broad stand-alone “Drowning Prevention Act” in most states. Instead, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, and Wisconsin all use some combination of public-health regulation of aquatic facilities and boating safety law to reduce drowning risk.

Public-pool and bathing-place laws are the most consistent statewide mechanism. Delaware uses a Public Pool Supervision Program with permitting, inspections, and operator oversight. Illinois requires licensed swimming facilities to meet safety standards, including a protective barrier at least 4 feet high with self-closing, self-latching gates. Maryland’s regulations include barriers, suction-entrapment prevention, and operator certification. Ohio regulates public pools, spas, and special-use pools through a licensure and annual inspection structure. Virginia’s public-pool regulations address fencing, depth marking, lifeguards, and other protective features. Washington, D.C., requires licensed pools to have a Certified Pool Operator, and the Pools Without Penalties Act of 2018 establishes standards for certain semi-public pools. Delaware, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin likewise use statewide rules on permitting, construction, operation, and inspection of public aquatic facilities.

Minnesota is the clearest example of a named drowning-prevention statute in this scan. The Abigail Taylor Pool Safety Act, enacted in 2008, focuses specifically on anti-entrapment protections, drain-cover safety, annual certifications, and closure triggers when critical drain protections are missing, broken, or loose. Minnesota also revised its pool code in 2022. Michigan’s public-pool law includes closure authority for unsafe pools and a specific accommodation for medically necessary life-jacket use. Pennsylvania’s most distinctive boating-related measure is its seasonal life-jacket wear law for small boats and paddle craft from November 1 through April 30. D.C.’s Pools Without Penalties Act of 2018 is another notable jurisdiction-specific law in this topic area.

Boating laws supply the second major layer of drowning prevention. Delaware requires children age 12 and under to wear life jackets on boats, and personal watercraft riders must wear them. Maryland requires children under 13 to wear life jackets on many smaller recreational vessels. Minnesota’s Grant Allen Law requires life-jacket wear for children under age 10 while a boat is underway. West Virginia requires children under 13 to wear life jackets while the vessel is

underway. Wisconsin requires at least one life jacket per person on board and requires the mandatory wear of a life jacket on personal watercraft. Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Delaware also use boating education requirements as a prevention strategy, while D.C. authorizes a boating safety and education program.

A dedicated statewide drowning-prevention task force or commission in most jurisdictions reviewed was not identified. One partial exception is Minnesota's 2025 boater-education legislation, which requires the commissioner to establish a working group of interested parties to develop course content and implementation recommendations. I also did not identify clear line-item appropriations to state health departments for drowning prevention in most reviewed laws. Where funding mechanisms were visible, they were more often fee-based licensing or plan-review authorities that support the administration of public-pool programs. Michigan's public-pool law authorizes fee-based payments to local health departments, and Ohio's pool statutes direct certain fees to administration and enforcement.

Because drowning prevention is often distributed across public-health regulations, boating laws, and local ordinances, this section should be read as a scan of statewide laws and regulations rather than a complete inventory of every municipal pool-fencing, beach, or waterfront safety requirement. The companion drowning-prevention spreadsheet provides the state-by-state table, plain-language summaries, years identified, task-force notes, funding notes, and official source links.

Selected source anchors

- Delaware Health and Social Services – Public Pool Supervision Program: <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/hsp/poolsandspas/>
- Illinois Department of Public Health – Swimming Facilities: <https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/swimming-facilities.html>
- Minnesota Department of Health – Public Pools: <https://www.health.mn.gov/communities/environment/recreation/pools/index.html>
- Ohio Department of Health – Public Pool and Spa Licensing: <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/recreational-water/public-pool-spa-licensing>
- DC Health – Swimming Pools: <https://dchealth.dc.gov/service/swimming-pools>
- See the companion drowning-prevention spreadsheet for the full state-by-state source list.