

The Honorable Bruce Bannister
Chairman, House Ways and Means Committee
South Carolina House of Representatives
525 Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

April 30, 2025

Dear Chairman Bannister and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

We, the undersigned county and municipal leaders, respectfully urge your support for **H.3858**, a bill that would provide long-overdue tax relief to South Carolina's boat owners: hardworking families, weekend anglers, and retirees who currently bear the highest boat property taxes in the United States.

These are not the wealthy elite — they are the backbone of our communities. Yet they are taxed five to seven times more than their neighbors just across the state line. That's not just uncompetitive — it's unjust. These taxes force South Carolinians to effectively "rent" their boats from the government year after year, stripping them of the full enjoyment and equity of their investment.

The consequences are already being felt. Nearly 78% of higher-end boats have been registered out of state to escape this punitive tax structure taking with them not just tourism and economic activity, but also a sense of pride in our state's waterways.

Some suggest that boat tax revenues are vital to local budgets. But the reality is this: in most counties and municipalities, boat property taxes account for less than 1% of total revenue. Suggesting this bill poses a budgetary crisis is disingenuous. With naturally growing tax bases and the ability to budget responsibly, local governments can absorb this modest reduction without sacrificing core services.

Further, these taxes do not directly fund marine services. They are general fund dollars not allocated to boat ramps, docks, waterway maintenance, or marine law enforcement. In essence, taxpayers are paying for services they don't receive.

This issue is one of fairness and trust. H.3858 is a bipartisan solution with 51 legislative cosponsors and the public support of Governor Henry McMaster. It's not about politics; it's about doing right by the people we serve.

We respectfully urge you to pass H.3858. Help us restore fairness, keep boats and dollars in South Carolina, and show our citizens that their leaders value their hard work and quality of life.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mayor Daniel Rickenmann – Columbia

Mayor William Cogswell – Charleston

Mayor Russ Touchberry – Summerville

Councilman Russell Brazell – Kershaw County

Councilman Brant Tomlinson – Kershaw County

Councilman Andy Litten – York County

Councilman Matthew Connelly – Allendale County

County Supervisor Johnny Cribb - Berkeley County