

House Education Committee

February 19th, 2025

Bill: HB 247 – School Swimming and Lifeguarding Programs

Sponsor: Representative Melissa G. Ballard

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Support

This Bill enacts provisions in public education related to water safety.

Discussion: Representative Ballard spoke to Amendment 1 of the Bill, which was adopted by the Committee. The amendment changes “shall” to “may” on line 51 making it optional for a school to provide water safety instruction. The sponsor explained that the Bill was heard in an interim committee. It serves two key purposes. First, it ensures that K-12 students acquire water safety skills, enabling them to protect themselves and others. These skills would be incorporated into PE standards. Second, the Bill allows students to earn PE credit by completing various aquatic training programs. A pool operator for Salt Lake County highlighted the Bill’s benefits, noting that drowning is a leading cause of death among children and that this initiative could provide both lifesaving education and recreational opportunities in schools. He also emphasized the vocational training benefits for teens earning PE credit through aquatic skill programs. Dennis Tesch, Aquatic Supervisor at the Wasatch Aquatic Center, spoke in support of the Bill. Dr. Richard Ferguson, representing the Black Physicians of Utah, reinforced the importance of swimming education and how this Bill would provide children with a crucial lifesaving skill.

Representative Elison asked about the swim instruction guidelines and how the State Board of Education would establish them. The sponsor explained that this was addressed in Amendment 1, clarifying that the State Board of Education would set standards while referencing federal guidelines. That said, individual schools would determine the curriculum. Representative Elison then inquired about implementation for local education agencies (“LEAs”) without pool access. The sponsor clarified that schools could partner with public or private pools but emphasized that base water safety skills do not require a pool. Representative Elison asked whether participation in the program was optional, the sponsor confirmed that it was not mandatory. Representative Miller then asked if the state board was already working on adding water safety to its standards. The sponsor acknowledged that efforts were underway but stressed that codifying this in law would allow public and private partnerships and provide an alternative to national standards. Representative Miller asked whether anything currently prevents LEAs from offering swim instruction. The sponsor responded that, while schools are not explicitly restricted, many are uncertain about their ability to implement such programs. She thought this Bill would clarify their options and encourage swim instruction. Representative Moss spoke in favor of the Bill, emphasizing the importance of quality swim instruction. The Utah PTA, Utah County Family Physicians, and Project Zero Drown Incorporated expressed support for the Bill.

Yeas: 6
Nays: 3
N/V: 7

Outcome: HB 247, as amended, passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

UNASSD