

# Federal Pool Safety Legislation Passes Congress

**Bill seeking to end childhood drowning heads for President's signature**

**December 18, 2007**

*(Washington, DC)* -- Legislation that seeks to end hundreds of preventable childhood deaths each year passed the House of Representatives today as part of a larger Energy Bill. The legislation had already passed the Senate, so the legislation goes to the President, who has indicated he will sign the legislation into law.

Rep. Wasserman Schultz introduced The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety in the House of Representatives to combat drowning, the second leading cause of accidental death for children ages one to fourteen years old. The legislation provides incentive grants to states that pass legislation implementing layers of protection to help prevent childhood drowning and establishes an educational outreach program to alert people to the potential dangers posed to children by pools and spas.

"Quite simply, the passage of this legislation means that fewer children will die from drowning in swimming pools or spas," 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 in 1998 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:

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

Mandates pools to be equipped with a suction outlet drain cover which prevents hair and body entanglement.

Requires the installation of a safety vacuum release system, shutting off a pump if it detects a blockage.

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 \$29 million to help end accidental drowning. Four million dollars in 2009 and 2010 to fund an incentive grant program for states that enact pool safety laws and twenty five million dollars from 2008-2012 to 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.

Rep. Wasserman Schultz's legislation passed the House of Representatives 418-3 on October 9th. The legislation then went to the Senate where Sen. Coburn (R-OK) placed a "hold" on the legislation. Despite repeated discussions with his office, the Senator refused to release his hold on the bill. Rep. Wasserman Schultz then called Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and asked him personally to move the legislation forward, going against the Senate tradition of respecting individual members' "holds." Sen. Reid went one step further, and on Wednesday, December 12, 2007 took to the floor of the Senate and used the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act as an example of Republican obstructionism. The legislation was then added to the Senate Energy bill, which passed the Senate on Thursday, December 13, 2007.