

House Bill 314 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)

By: Representatives Stephens of the 164<sup>th</sup>, Hawkins of the 27<sup>th</sup>, Morris of the 26<sup>th</sup>, Barr of the 103<sup>rd</sup>, Tanner of the 9<sup>th</sup>, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 7 of Title 52 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
2 registration, operation, and sale of watercraft, so as to provide for the titling of certain  
3 vessels; to provide for procedures with regard to titling such vessels; to provide for  
4 legislative intent and findings; to provide a short title; to provide for related matters; to  
5 provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

7 **SECTION 1.**

8 This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Georgia Uniform Certificate of Title for  
9 Vessels Act."

10 **SECTION 2.**

11 The General Assembly finds that:

- 12 (1) Titles for vessels in this state would deter and impede theft;
- 13 (2) Titles for vessels in this state would facilitate the ownership, transfer, and financing
- 14 of such vessels; and
- 15 (3) Titling of vessels would create equity and fairness for the selling of vessels by dealers,
- 16 brokers, agents, private parties, and manufacturers.

17 **SECTION 3.**

18 Chapter 7 of Title 52 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to registration,  
19 operation, and sale of watercraft, is amended by revising Code Section 52-7-4, relating to  
20 requirement as to numbering of vessels, as follows:

21 "52-7-4.

22 (a) Every vessel using the waters of this state shall be numbered, except those vessels  
23 exempted by Code Section 52-7-6 and those vessels documented by the United States  
24 Coast Guard and licensed pursuant to Code Section 27-2-8. No person shall operate or

25 give permission for the operation of any such vessel on the waters of this state unless the  
26 vessel is numbered in accordance with this article or in accordance with applicable federal  
27 law or in accordance with a federally approved numbering system of another state and  
28 unless:

29 (1) The certificate of number issued to the vessel is on board and in full force and effect;  
30 and

31 (2) The identifying number set forth in the certificate of number is properly displayed  
32 on each side of the forward half of the vessel; provided, however, that this requirement  
33 shall not apply to numbered vessels which are documented by the United States Coast  
34 Guard.

35 (b) Every vessel using the waters of this state shall be titled unless it is exempt from the  
36 numbering requirements of subsection (a) of this Code section or exempt under Code  
37 Section 52-7-7. No person shall operate or give permission for the operation of any such  
38 vessel on the waters of this state unless the vessel is titled in accordance with this article.  
39 Every outboard motor greater than 25 horsepower used to propel a titled vessel shall be  
40 included on the vessel title.

41 (c) Except as provided in subsection (e) of this Code section, at or before the time the  
42 owner of record transfers an ownership interest in a hull damaged vessel that is covered by  
43 a certificate of number created by the department, if the damage occurred while such  
44 person was an owner of the vessel and the person has notice of the damage at the time of  
45 the transfer, the owner shall:

46 (1) Deliver to the department an application for a new certificate of number that includes  
47 the title brand designation 'Hull Damaged'; or

48 (2) Indicate on the certificate of title or on the bill of sale or other transfer document in  
49 the place designated for such purpose that the vessel is hull damaged and deliver the  
50 certificate or other transfer document to the transferee.

51 (d) Not later than 20 days after delivery to the department of the application under  
52 paragraph (1) of subsection (c) of this Code section or the delivery to the transferee of the  
53 certificate of title or bill of sale under paragraph (2) of subsection (c) of this Code section,  
54 the department shall create a new record that indicates that the vessel is branded 'Hull  
55 Damaged.'

56 (e) Before an insurer transfers an ownership interest in a hull damaged vessel that is  
57 covered by a certificate of number created by the department, the insurer shall deliver to  
58 the department an application for a new certificate that includes the title brand designation  
59 'Hull Damaged.' Not later than 20 days after delivery of the application to the department,  
60 the department shall create a new record which indicates that the vessel is branded 'Hull  
61 Damaged.'

62 (f) An owner of record that fails to comply with subsection (c) of this Code section, a  
 63 person that solicits or colludes in a failure by an owner of record to comply with  
 64 subsection (c) of this Code section, or an insurer that fails to comply with subsection (e)  
 65 of this Code section is subject to a civil penalty of \$1,000.00.

66 (g) For the purposes of this Code section, the term 'Hull Damaged' means compromised  
 67 with respect to the integrity of a vessel's hull by a collision, allision, lightning strike, fire,  
 68 explosion, running aground, or similar occurrence that creates a significant risk to the  
 69 integrity of the vessel's hull."

#### 70 SECTION 4.

71 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 52-7-5, relating to numbering of  
 72 vessels, requirements, and fees, as follows:

73 "52-7-5.

74 (a) The owner of each vessel required to be numbered by this article shall file an  
 75 application for a certificate of number with the department on forms containing such  
 76 information required by the department. Upon receipt of the completed application and  
 77 any other required information and documents, the department shall enter the application  
 78 upon its records and issue to the applicant a certificate of number stating the number  
 79 assigned to the vessel, the name and address of the owner, and such additional information  
 80 as may be prescribed by the department. The department shall maintain electronic records  
 81 of title and furnish a physical certificate of title to the owner or lienholder upon request.

82 (b)(1) The identification number assigned to all registered vessels, except those  
 83 documented by the United States Coast Guard, shall be permanently painted on or  
 84 attached to each side of the forward half of the vessel, and no other number may be  
 85 displayed thereon. Numbers shall read from left to right, be in block characters, be of a  
 86 color contrasting with the background, and be not less than three inches in height nor  
 87 more than one inch apart. There shall be a hyphen or space between the prefix letters and  
 88 numerals and between the numerals and the suffix letters. The hyphen or space shall be  
 89 equal to the width of any letter except I.

90 (2) On vessels so configured that a number on the hull or superstructure would not be  
 91 easily visible, the number shall be painted on or attached to a backing plate that is  
 92 attached to the forward half of the vessel so that the number will be clearly visible under  
 93 normal operating conditions.

94 (3) The numbers shall be maintained in a legible condition.

95 (4) Vessels owned by manufacturers or dealers and being used as demonstrators or for  
 96 testing on state waters may use the dealer's tag supplied with his or her registration in lieu  
 97 of a permanently attached number. Such vessels owned by manufacturers and dealers

98 and only used as demonstrators or for testing using a dealer's tag shall not be required to  
99 be titled.

100 (c) Expiration decals shall be assigned by the department to all registered vessels. Such  
101 decals shall be displayed one on each side of the bow preceding the prefix letters and  
102 maintained in legible condition. There shall be a hyphen or space separating each decal  
103 and the prefix letters which shall be equal to the width of any letter except I.

104 (d) Applications shall be signed by the owner or owners of the vessel and shall be  
105 accompanied by the proper fee. Fees for numbering vessels for a registration period of  
106 three years shall be as follows:

107	(1) Vessels up to 16 feet in length . . . . .	\$25.00
108	(2) Vessels 16 to 26 feet in length . . . . .	60.00
109	(3) Vessels 26 to 40 feet in length . . . . .	130.00
110	(4) Vessels 40 feet in length or longer . . . . .	200.00

111 After July 1, 2017, the General Assembly shall not increase the cost of any fee provided  
112 for in this subsection by more than 20 percent.

113 (e)(1) Registration for vessels shall expire on the last day of the month of the owner's  
114 birth in the last year of the registration period and shall thereafter be of no force or effect  
115 unless renewed pursuant to this article; provided, however, that the registration for  
116 vessels not owned by individuals shall expire on December 31 of the last year of the  
117 registration period. Certificates of number may be renewed by the owner in the same  
118 manner provided for in the initial securing of such certificates.

119 (2) Registrations may be renewed any time after October 1 prior to the year of  
120 expiration. If the certificate of number is allowed to expire, a renewal application may  
121 still be filed with the department so long as the applicant pays the registration fee  
122 prescribed in subsection (d) of this Code section along with a \$10.00 late fee.

123 (3) Any application which, due to failure of the applicant to provide additional  
124 information required by the department, remains incomplete 60 days after initial receipt  
125 of such application shall expire, and a new application and registration or title fee shall  
126 be required.

127 (f) Should the ownership of a numbered or titled vessel change while a valid registration  
128 or title is in effect, the new owner shall file with the department a new application and pay  
129 the prescribed fee for a new registration or title. The number assigned upon transfer of  
130 ownership shall be identical to the previous number unless such number has been  
131 reassigned by the department during any expired registration or title period.

132 (g) In the event that an agency of the United States government shall have in force an  
133 overall system of identification (numbering) for vessels within the United States, the

134 numbering system employed pursuant to this article by the department shall be in  
 135 conformity therewith. The provisions for titling employed pursuant to this article by the  
 136 department shall be in conformity for approval by the United States Coast Guard under  
 137 provisions of 46 U.S.C. Section 31322(d)(1).

138 (h) The department may issue any certificate of number, expiration decal, marine toilet  
 139 certification, title, or other permit or accept applications for registration or titling provided  
 140 for in this chapter directly or may authorize any person to act as agent for the issuing or  
 141 collection and maintenance of information thereof. In the event that a person accepts such  
 142 authorization to issue certificates of title or number, he or she may be allotted a block of  
 143 numbers and certificates or provided direction and instruction therefor which, upon  
 144 assignment and issue in conformity with this article and with any rules and regulations of  
 145 the department, shall be valid as if assigned and issued directly by the department. Any  
 146 person acting as agent for the department may charge a fee for his or her services in an  
 147 amount approved by the department not to exceed \$10.00 per transaction.

148 (i) All records of the department made or kept pursuant to this Code section shall be public  
 149 records.

150 (j) The owner shall furnish the department notice of the transfer of all or of any part of his  
 151 or her interest, other than the creation of a security interest, in a vessel numbered in this  
 152 state pursuant to this Code section, the theft or recovery of the vessel, or the destruction or  
 153 abandonment of the vessel within 15 days thereof, in a manner specified by the department.

154 (k) Any holder of a certificate of number or title shall notify the department in writing  
 155 within ~~15~~ 30 days if his or her address no longer conforms to the address appearing on the  
 156 certificate or title and shall, as a part of such notification, furnish the department with his  
 157 or her new address.

158 (l) No number other than the number validly assigned to a vessel shall be painted,  
 159 attached, or otherwise displayed on either side of the forward half of the vessel.

160 (m)(1) A certificate of number or title once issued pursuant to this Code section shall be  
 161 considered void upon the happening of any one of the following events:

162 (A) The owner transfers all his or her interest in said vessel to another person or  
 163 involuntarily loses his or her interest through legal process;

164 (B) The vessel is destroyed or abandoned;

165 (C) It is discovered by the department that the application submitted by the owner  
 166 contains false or fraudulent information;

167 (D) The fees for issuance are not paid by the applicant; or

168 (E) The state of principal use is changed.

169 (2) A void certificate or title shall be surrendered to the department within 15 days from  
 170 the date that it becomes or is declared to be void.

- 171 (n) The number placed on the forward half of the vessel by the owner shall be removed by  
172 the owner if:
- 173 (1) The vessel is documented under the laws of the United States;
- 174 (2) The certificate ~~or~~ of number or title becomes invalid because it is determined that a  
175 false or fraudulent statement was made in the application or the fees have not been paid;  
176 or
- 177 (3) The vessel is no longer used in this state.
- 178 (o) The board shall be authorized to establish, by rule or regulation, a procedure to refund  
179 fees collected pursuant to this chapter which were collected in error or overpayment or to  
180 which the department or state is otherwise not entitled."

181 **SECTION 5.**

182 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2020.

183 **SECTION 6.**

184 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.