



## Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
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### **Summer Pool Season is Here – Lifeguards Needed**

As the weather heats up, many people look forward to heading to their community swimming pool or to one of the waterparks in the Wisconsin Dells. Swimming is the fourth most common recreational activity in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. For the last couple of years, swimming pools around the country have reported difficulty finding enough lifeguards to safely staff their pools. Wisconsin is no different; recent news stories indicate a number of the state's swimming pools are considering reduced hours or a shorter swim season because they cannot find enough lifeguards. I am proposing a change to Wisconsin's lifeguard law to help alleviate this shortage.

In fact, many seasonal employers report difficulty finding teenaged workers. In 1978, 60 percent of American teenagers worked summer jobs or were looking for work. In 2016, only 35 percent of teenagers reported that they had a summer job or were looking for one. While there is no clear, easy answer to explain the drop in teen employment, getting ready for college might be one of the reasons. According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of teenagers taking summer school classes has tripled in the past twenty years. With more teenagers in the classroom, there are fewer available to work as lifeguards.

Swimming, or bathing as it was once known, became a popular recreation activity in the 1800s, before there were trained lifeguards. By the early 1900s, 9,000 people drowned each year in the United States prompting both the YMCA and the American Red Cross to create lifeguard training courses in 1912 and 1914, respectively. Both organizations updated their training programs in the 1980s to provide nationwide standardized programs. Today, the incidents of

drowning are down significantly, averaging about 4,000 a year. Although a pool may only have 10 to 15 lifeguards guarding at one time, they have to hire many more than that to cover all shifts.

While federal law allows 15 year olds to be employed as lifeguards, Wisconsin state law requires that lifeguards be 16 years of age. A person may take the American Red Cross lifeguarding course at age 15, but cannot be employed as a lifeguard in Wisconsin until their 16th birthday. Wisconsin is an outlier among states concerning its minimum age requirement for lifeguards, with most states setting the bar at age 15. Federal law restricts 15 year old lifeguards to certain lifeguarding activities. For instance, they can guard a swimming pool from a lifeguard stand, but may not be stationed at the top of a power-driven slide and may not enter or work in a mechanical room, where the filtration system is, or in a chemical storage area where pool chemicals are housed.

I have introduced a bill, Senate Bill 251, which changes the minimum lifeguard age from 16 to 15, aligning Wisconsin with federal law. The intention of the bill is to expand the pool of potential lifeguards and provide additional employment opportunities for 15 year olds. While fewer American teens are working summer jobs, these types of jobs often teach the soft skills that employers say they need in their adult workers. Lowering the age requirement for lifeguards to bring Wisconsin law in line with federal law could provide a way to encourage more teens to work at a waterpark or community swimming pool.

*If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: [Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us](mailto:Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us). You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.*