

Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

CS/CS/HB 223 — Marina Evacuations

by State Affairs Committee; Pandemics and Public Emergencies Committee; and Rep. Plasencia and others (SB 578 by Senator Wright)

Upon the issuance of a hurricane watch that affects the waters of marinas located in a deepwater seaport, the bill prohibits vessels under 500 gross tons from remaining in the waters of such marinas that have been deemed not suitable for refuge during a hurricane. The bill requires that vessel owners promptly remove their vessels from the waterways upon an evacuation order issued by the deepwater seaport.

A marina owner, operator, employee, or agent (marina owner), is required to remove the vessel, if reasonable, from its slip, if the Coast Guard Captain of the Port sets the port condition to “Yankee” and a vessel owner has failed to remove his or her vessel. The marina owner may charge the vessel owner a reasonable fee for removing the vessel. “Yankee” means that gale force winds (39-54 miles per hour) from a tropical or hurricane force storm are predicted to make landfall at the port within 24 hours, the port is closed to inbound traffic, and vessel traffic control measures are in effect on vessel movements within the port.

The bill provides that a marina owner may not be held liable for any damage to the vessel from a hurricane and is held harmless for removing the vessel. The bill provides that after a hurricane watch has been issued, if a vessel owner has not removed the vessel pursuant to an order from the seaport, the owner may be fined by the deepwater seaport.

The bill does not provide immunity to a marina owner for any damage caused by intentional acts or negligence when removing a vessel. The bill does not require a deepwater seaport to issue an order to evacuate vessels or fine a vessel owner that has failed to remove the vessel.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2021.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 116-0