

## Boat Property Tax and Registration Fees

By: Rute Pinho, Chief Legislative Analyst  
September 28, 2026 | 2026-R-0130

### Issue

You asked (1) why the legislature replaced the property tax on boats with an annual registration fee, (2) how many boats are currently registered in Connecticut, and (3) how much state revenue these registrations generate.

This report updates parts of OLR reports [2007-R-0377](#) and [2010-R-0018](#).

### Summary

In 1981, the General Assembly eliminated the property tax on boats and replaced it with an annual state registration fee (PA 81-423). The same act also required the state to remit most of this fee revenue back to towns to reimburse them for the lost property tax revenue. The act's legislative history indicates that the rationale for this change was to address the (1) revenue losses towns were experiencing due to owners registering their boats in other states to avoid paying personal property taxes on them and (2) administrative burden of assessing and collecting property taxes on boats.

According to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), there were approximately 93,000 boat registrations in Connecticut in FY 26, which generated \$4.67 million in General Fund revenue. DMV data shows approximately 87,000 vessels currently registered in CT (82,873 with Connecticut addresses and 3,786 with out-of-state addresses). Attachment 1 below shows the total number of registered boats in each municipality as of September 10, 2026. Attachment 2 below shows the total number of out-of-state boats as of the same date.

## Rationale for Eliminating the Property Tax on Boats

Before PA 81-423's enactment, boat owners were generally required to pay personal property taxes on most boats (with certain exceptions, including for commercial boats), either to the town where the boat was kept or the owner's town of residence. The act exempted all boats from the property tax and replaced it with an annual state registration fee. In doing so, it extended the prior registration process for motorboats to all boats and set a new registration fee schedule generally based on the boat's length. The new fee schedule ranged from \$10 for boats less than 12 feet long to \$700 for boats at least 65 feet long. (The legislature later enacted a reduced fee schedule in 1984 (PA 84-495).)

Under PA 81-423, all boat registration revenue was directed to the Boating Fund, which by law was used for (1) paying state agency expenses for enforcing boating safety and pollution laws and (2) reimbursing towns for their expenses for boating law enforcement, safety education, and facility improvement. The act generally required that any revenue that exceeded \$600,000 per year be distributed to towns in lieu of the property taxes paid on boats on the 1978 grand list. (In 1994, the Boating Fund became a separate account within the Conservation Fund ([PA 94-130](#), § 10). In 2011, the legislature eliminated the separate account and redirected boating registration revenue to the General Fund ([PA 11-6](#), §§ 133 & 165).) We have attached a copy of the [OLR summary of PA 81-423](#) for a more detailed explanation.

PA 81-423's legislative history indicates that the act was primarily designed to address the problem of boat owners registering their boats in other states to avoid paying property taxes on them. During the public hearing on SB 430, which became PA 81-423, Senator Schneller testified that boat registrations had increased significantly in Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the prior 10 years but declined in Connecticut over the same period. He remarked that "a system that provides an incentive to register boats out of state is basically a system that should be changed" (*Finance Committee Public Hearing Transcripts*, April 14, 1981, p. 1784).

Others testified that the property tax on boats was particularly difficult to administer. Essex First Selectmen Richard Riggio, for example, remarked that the bill was "designed to eliminate...the difficulties of administration" and "problems of policing." He noted that "[a]n owner can moor his boat in one town during the summer and move to another for the winter and legally the owner need not pay the tax in either town" and added that this was a "very common occurrence substantiated by shoreline and Connecticut River town assessors" (*Finance Committee Public Hearing Transcripts*, April 14, 1981, p. 1790).

During the Senate debate on the bill, Senator Schneller discussed the unintended consequences of taxing vessels as personal property. “We have had a great problem with this personal property tax on boats, of identifying boats and having this tax paid. And I think that changing the process from a personal property tax on boats at the local level to a registration of boats by the state will bring a great deal of more boats under the state registration then we presently derive revenue from” (*Senate Proceedings*, May 20, 1981, pp. 4100-01).

Representative Ryback made similar remarks during the House debate on the bill, noting that the bill was designed to “encourage more residents to register their boats in Connecticut by replacing the local personal property tax on boats and providing the towns with a payment in lieu of taxes to be funded out a revised state registration fee schedule.” He estimated that the out-of-state registrations cost the state \$6.8 million. Additionally, he explained that the bill would eliminate the “burdensome and frustrating task from the local assessor’s office” (*House Proceedings*, May 29, 1981, p. 8628).

RP:ms

### Attachment 1: Number of Registered Boats by Municipality (as of September 10, 2026)

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Andover      | 126   |
| Ansonia      | 205   |
| Ashford      | 163   |
| Avon         | 340   |
| Barkhamsted  | 175   |
| Beacon Falls | 114   |
| Berlin       | 659   |
| Bethany      | 139   |
| Bethel       | 278   |
| Bethlehem    | 133   |
| Bloomfield   | 156   |
| Bolton       | 248   |
| Bozrah       | 96    |
| Branford     | 1,507 |
| Bridgeport   | 581   |
| Bridgewater  | 84    |
| Bristol      | 955   |
| Brookfield   | 887   |
| Brooklyn     | 161   |
| Burlington   | 376   |
| Canaan       | 99    |
| Canterbury   | 211   |
| Canton       | 230   |
| Chaplin      | 80    |
| Cheshire     | 565   |
| Chester      | 372   |
| Clinton      | 773   |
| Colchester   | 748   |
| Colebrook    | 60    |

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Columbia      | 372   |
| Cornwall      | 36    |
| Coventry      | 680   |
| Cromwell      | 395   |
| Danbury       | 1291  |
| Darien        | 1057  |
| Deep River    | 397   |
| Derby         | 147   |
| Durham        | 365   |
| East Granby   | 149   |
| East Haddam   | 808   |
| East Hampton  | 903   |
| East Hartford | 488   |
| East Haven    | 483   |
| East Lyme     | 1,317 |
| East Windsor  | 236   |
| Eastford      | 80    |
| Easton        | 212   |
| Ellington     | 484   |
| Enfield       | 801   |
| Essex         | 757   |
| Fairfield     | 1,624 |
| Farmington    | 445   |
| Franklin      | 102   |
| Glastonbury   | 965   |
| Goshen        | 325   |
| Granby        | 378   |
| Greenwich     | 2,103 |
| Griswold      | 616   |

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Groton <sup>1</sup> | 1,117 |
| Guilford            | 1,159 |
| Haddam              | 769   |
| Hamden              | 414   |
| Hampton             | 119   |
| Hartford            | 301   |
| Hartland            | 88    |
| Harwinton           | 210   |
| Hebron              | 447   |
| Kent                | 59    |
| Killingly           | 379   |
| Killingworth        | 434   |
| Lebanon             | 382   |
| Ledyard             | 550   |
| Lisbon              | 156   |
| Litchfield          | 331   |
| Lyme                | 295   |
| Madison             | 727   |
| Manchester          | 676   |
| Mansfield           | 228   |
| Marlborough         | 279   |
| Meriden             | 714   |
| Middlebury          | 233   |
| Middlefield         | 230   |
| Middletown          | 702   |
| Milford             | 1,469 |
| Monroe              | 421   |
| Montville           | 632   |
| Morris              | 218   |

|                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| Naugatuck        | 340   |
| New Britain      | 551   |
| New Canaan       | 349   |
| New Fairfield    | 1,027 |
| New Hartford     | 420   |
| New Haven        | 501   |
| New London       | 262   |
| New Milford      | 1,104 |
| Newington        | 528   |
| Newtown          | 935   |
| Norfolk          | 43    |
| North Branford   | 449   |
| North Canaan     | 24    |
| North Haven      | 425   |
| North Stonington | 364   |
| Norwalk          | 2,133 |
| Norwich          | 465   |
| Old Lyme         | 927   |
| Old Saybrook     | 1,002 |
| Orange           | 299   |
| Oxford           | 615   |
| Plainfield       | 398   |
| Plainville       | 341   |
| Plymouth         | 336   |
| Pomfret          | 110   |
| Portland         | 454   |
| Preston          | 270   |
| Prospect         | 275   |
| Putnam           | 148   |

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Redding       | 189 |
| Ridgefield    | 343 |
| Rocky Hill    | 426 |
| Roxbury       | 62  |
| Salem         | 299 |
| Salisbury     | 215 |
| Scotland      | 29  |
| Seymour       | 372 |
| Sharon        | 59  |
| Shelton       | 884 |
| Sherman       | 418 |
| Simsbury      | 401 |
| Somers        | 289 |
| South Windsor | 448 |

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Southbury               | 615   |
| Southington             | 1,073 |
| Sprague                 | 93    |
| Stafford                | 415   |
| Stamford                | 1,457 |
| Sterling                | 109   |
| Stonington <sup>1</sup> | 1,632 |
| Stratford               | 788   |
| Suffield                | 440   |
| Thomaston               | 211   |
| Thompson                | 392   |
| Tolland                 | 529   |
| Torrington              | 601   |
| Trumbull                | 471   |

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Union         | 58    |
| Vernon        | 503   |
| Voluntown     | 259   |
| Wallingford   | 857   |
| Warren        | 69    |
| Washington    | 142   |
| Waterbury     | 574   |
| Waterford     | 1,145 |
| Watertown     | 437   |
| West Hartford | 667   |
| West Haven    | 486   |
| Westbrook     | 617   |
| Weston        | 186   |
| Westport      | 1,129 |

|                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Wethersfield       | 455           |
| Willington         | 198           |
| Wilton             | 394           |
| Winchester         | 527           |
| Windham            | 283           |
| Windsor            | 415           |
| Windsor Locks      | 283           |
| Wolcott            | 520           |
| Woodbridge         | 186           |
| Woodbury           | 243           |
| Woodstock          | 313           |
| Other <sup>2</sup> | 1,296         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       | <b>82,873</b> |

Source: OLR analysis of DMV boat registrations by mailing address

<sup>1</sup> Total does not include boats registered to mailing addresses in Mystic, CT (1,282) that could be located in either Groton or Stonington.

<sup>2</sup> Includes boats registered to mailing addresses that could not be assigned to a specific municipality (1,282 registrations in Mystic, five in Georgetown, and nine that appear to have out-of-state mailing addresses).

## Attachment 2: Number of Out-of-State Registered Boats by Jurisdiction (as of September 10, 2026)

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Alabama              | 1   |
| Arizona              | 6   |
| California           | 49  |
| Colorado             | 22  |
| District of Columbia | 7   |
| Delaware             | 18  |
| Florida              | 644 |
| Georgia              | 27  |
| Illinois             | 11  |
| Indiana              | 2   |
| Kansas               | 11  |
| Louisiana            | 2   |
| Massachusetts        | 744 |
| Maryland             | 22  |
| Maine                | 11  |

|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| Michigan       | 4     |
| Minnesota      | 2     |
| Missouri       | 5     |
| Montana        | 1     |
| North Carolina | 39    |
| North Dakota   | 1     |
| Nebraska       | 1     |
| New Hampshire  | 24    |
| New Jersey     | 220   |
| New Mexico     | 2     |
| Nevada         | 5     |
| New York       | 1,518 |
| Ohio           | 9     |
| Oregon         | 2     |
| Pennsylvania   | 61    |

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Puerto Rico    | 2            |
| Rhode Island   | 131          |
| South Carolina | 43           |
| South Dakota   | 1            |
| Tennessee      | 6            |
| Texas          | 42           |
| Utah           | 5            |
| Virginia       | 38           |
| Vermont        | 33           |
| Washington     | 7            |
| Wisconsin      | 2            |
| West Virginia  | 2            |
| Wyoming        | 2            |
| Unspecified    | 1            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>3,786</b> |

Source: OLR analysis of DMV boat registrations by mailing address