



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 21, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr  
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

### **RE: SB 933 - Vehicle Laws – Protective Headgear Requirement for Motorcycle Rides – Exception - Letter of Opposition**

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of opposition for Senate Bill (SB) 933 - Vehicle Laws – Protective Headgear Requirement for Motorcycle Rides – Exception. SB 933 exempts an individual from wearing protective headgear when operating a motorcycle if the individual is at least 21 years old and (1) licensed to operate a motorcycle for at least two years, (2) has completed a motorcycle rider safety course approved by the Administrator or the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, or (3) is a passenger on a motorcycle operated by an individual described in (1) or (2) of this exemption.

This bill will result in increased motorcycle injuries and fatalities, as well as an increased economic burden on the State. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that protective headgear such as helmets saved the lives of 1,872 motorcyclists in 2017.<sup>1</sup> In Maryland alone, helmets saved an estimated 43 lives in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Protective headgear is approximately 37% effective in preventing fatalities to motorcyclists.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, motorcycle helmet laws can reduce the risk of traumatic brain injury (TBI) up to 69%.<sup>3</sup>

A universal helmet law is by far the most effective method for preventing motorcyclist injuries and fatalities.<sup>4</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “On average states with universal helmet laws save eight times more lives per 100,000 motorcycle registrations each year compared to states without a helmet law, and save three times more lives

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019). Lives saved in 2017 by restraint use and minimum-drinking-age laws (Traffic Safety Facts Crash\*Stats. Report No. DOT HS 812 683). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812683>

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019). Lives and costs saved by motorcycle helmets, 2017. Traffic Safety Facts Crash\*Stats (Report No. DOT HS 812 867). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812867>

<sup>3</sup> Liu BC, Ivers R, Norton R, Boufous S, Blows S, Lo SK, Helmets for preventing injury in motorcycle riders (Review), The Cochrane Library, Issue 1, 2009. Available online at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004333.pub3/abstract>

<sup>4</sup> Governor Highway Safety Association. (2018). *Motorcyclist Traffic fatalities by state: 2017 preliminary data*. Washington, DC: Governors Highway Safety Association

per 100,000 motorcycle registrations each year compared to states with a partial helmet law.”<sup>5</sup> In 2020, NHTSA reported that there were 5.2 times as many motorcyclist fatalities in states without a universal helmet law compared to states with universal helmet laws.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the human toll taken in deaths and injuries, motorcycle crashes carry a sizable financial cost. In 2017, motorcycle helmets saved Maryland nearly \$100 million in direct economic costs, and over \$590 million in comprehensive costs (the economic cost plus valuation for lost quality of life). If every motorcyclist had worn a helmet, the comprehensive cost savings would have increased by over \$65 million.<sup>7</sup>

Maryland’s universal motorcycle helmet law is an effective public health strategy aimed at significantly reducing motorcycle-related injuries and fatalities. Rolling back the law to only cover riders younger than 21 will result in increased serious injuries and deaths along with increased economic costs. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at [megan.peters@maryland.gov](mailto:megan.peters@maryland.gov) or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'LH Scott', is positioned above the typed name.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.  
Secretary

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<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *Motorcycle safety: How to save lives and save money*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (U.S.). Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S.). <http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pdf/mc2012/MotorcycleSafetyBook.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (May, 2022). *Motorcycles: 2020 data* (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 306). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

<sup>7</sup> Traffic Safety Facts. Lives and Costs Saved by Motorcycle Helmets, 2017 (DOT HS 812 867) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.