



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office of Crime
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

February 1, 2024

Re: HB 113 | Vehicle Laws - Horse Riding - Helmet Requirement for Minors

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

HB 113 reflects a pressing issue concerning the safety and well-being of our young equestrians in Maryland. Horseback riding is a historically and culturally rich activity that anyone is able to enjoy. From Native American culture, to therapy and sports competitions, it is understood to be a core aspect of enjoyment and rigor in many Marylander's lives. With that, there are also risks understood just as in any sport, and these risks can be mitigated through safe practices such as wearing the proper equipment like helmets. While the risk of fatality from horseback riding is relatively low, the CDC reports that a study observed 60% of fatalities from 1976-1987 being associated with head injuries.¹ Furthermore, while falls account for the majority of injuries associated with horseback riding, less than 20% of individuals had a helmet on at the time of the fall.² Based on this evidence, the CDC highly recommends helmet use, specifically with standardized safety designs, as a preventative measure of traumatic injuries, just as helmets and protective gear are recommended and required for other intensive activities such as motorcycle riding and youth-bicyclists.³⁴

HB 113 seeks to mandate the use of protective headgear for minors engaging in horseback riding on highways, public horse-riding paths or trails, and the grounds of facilities that offer recreational, educational, or competitive equestrian activities *to the public*. Specifically, the bill requires that any adult present and directly supervising a minor riding a horse ensures the minor wears a helmet properly secured and meeting with or exceeding the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards for equestrian riding helmets.

¹ "Current Trends Injuries Associated with Horseback Riding --United States, 1987 and 1988." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed January 24, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001626.htm>.

² Grossman JA, Kulund DN, Miller CW, et al. Equestrian injuries: results of a prospective study. JAMA 1978;240:1881-2. Accessed January 24, 2024.

³ "Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration." MVA. Accessed January 24, 2024. https://mva.maryland.gov/safety/Pages/motorcycle/protective-gear.aspx#:~:text=*In%20Maryland%2C%20individuals%20may%20not,they%20do%20not%20prevent%20crashes.

⁴ "Your Bicycle Helmet - Mdot Sha." MDOT State Highway Administration. Accessed January 24, 2024. <https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/Index.aspx?pageid=599>.

This legislation not only emphasizes the critical importance of preventative measures in recreational activities, but also underlines the need for legislation which prioritizes the physical wellbeing of our younger population and ensures they can thrive in adulthood. The Council has voted in favor of endorsing **HB 113**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Advocating for proactive measures which ensure the safety of youth and students (Article IV. Health And Social Issues; Clause F), and;
- b. Supporting initiatives designed to promote the physical and social well-being of Maryland Youth (Article IV. Health And Social Issues; Clause P).

HB 113 is not only a step forward in enhancing the safety of young equestrians, but also respects the diverse heritage of horseback riding within Maryland. Through this legislation, we align with best practices in safety and take a significant step towards preventing avoidable accidents and injuries. The Council believes it the duty of the Maryland General Assembly to pass legislation which will create a safe, healthy future for our generation. For these reasons, the Council supports **HB 113** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Minakowski', written in a cursive style.

Grace Minakowski, Chair
Maryland Youth Advisory Council