

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

1/31/24

My name is Victoria Picha, I am an active youth participant in Maryland's horse community. I am testifying in strong support of the bill "Vehicle Laws - Horse Riding - Helmet Requirement for Minors", as I believe it is crucial to address the lack of strict enforcement regarding the use of helmets for youth equestrians in our state. I have spent my entire life around horses, having owned my own since the age of six. I am 17 now and despite more than a decade of experience, I am aware that horses, with their unpredictable nature, can pose danger in many situations. I've witnessed both adults and children around me sustain injuries in various scenarios, leaving us all in shock.

My argument is straightforward: if bicyclists under the age of 16 are required to wear helmets on public property, why shouldn't similar rules or even stricter ones apply to youth engaging in horse riding? Unlike bikes, horses have their own thoughts and actions, making them inherently more dangerous. Allow me to underscore the importance of this matter through a personal experience. Over the summer, my riding coach was involved in an accident during a competition. Her horse, Tora, suffered an aneurysm and fell on top of her. While Tora, unfortunately, did not survive, my coach miraculously walked away with no serious injuries. The effectiveness of her appropriately worn helmet undoubtedly played a vital role in avoiding the potential severity of this incident.

Please consider this: if all youth participants in Maryland's horse community were mandated to wear correctly fitted and regulation-compliant helmets, countless brain injuries

could be prevented, ensuring the safety of our future equestrians. Expert opinions in the equestrian field strongly advocate for mandatory helmet use, with recognized horse-riding organizations providing safety guidelines that show the necessity of such precautions.

I share this testimony not only for my own experiences but on behalf of numerous friends who are also youth riders in Maryland's horse community. It is ingrained in us to prioritize safety by wearing correctly fitted helmets. Passing this bill would reinforce this commitment to the well-being of our youth. I appreciate your consideration of these matters and the importance of ensuring the safety of our youth in equestrian activities. I urge you to support and pass SB 42 for the safety of our community.

Respectfully Submitted,
Victoria Picha