



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

P.O. Box 606 | Lisbon, Maryland 21797
www.mdhorsecouncil.org

One Common Bond: The Horse
One Common Voice: The Horse Council

In the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, January 31, 2024

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 42

Vehicle Laws – Horse Riding – Helmet Requirement for Minors - **FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. Almost 500,000 Maryland households contain at least one person who owns a horse and/or participates in equestrian activities.

A recent Economic Impact Study conducted for the American Horse Council found that 16% of Maryland horse owners and 33% of Marylanders who do not own their own horses but who ride horses owned by others, are under the age of 18.

There are numerous reasons why this is a good bill. According to recent research:

- Seventy percent of all reported equestrian fall accidents resulted in a head injury, of which 91% were concussions.
- Head injuries account for 18 percent of emergency room injuries among equestrians.
- Medical Examiner reports show that 60% or more of horse-related deaths are caused by head injuries. Helmets can reduce this possibility by 70-80%.
- The American Medical Equestrian Association calculates that ASTM approved helmets have reduced all riding-related head injuries by 30% and severe head injuries by 50%.
- Head injuries are the most common reason for horse-related hospital admissions.
([https://sportsmedicine-open.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40798-019-0193-0#:~:text=Injuries%20reported%20for%20undamaged%20helmets,diffuse%20axonal%20injury%20\(DAI\)](https://sportsmedicine-open.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40798-019-0193-0#:~:text=Injuries%20reported%20for%20undamaged%20helmets,diffuse%20axonal%20injury%20(DAI);); https://vtx.vt.edu/videos/k/2021/10/1_dtsg3mj7.html;
<https://equusmagazine.com/riding/riding-helmet-facts/>)
- Many horse organizations in Maryland, including Pony Clubs and horse show/competition associations and venues already support and promote helmet safety and require that minors and adults wear ASTM approved helmets at all times while mounted. Many lesson

stables do, as well, frequently required by insurance carriers, though some report receiving “pushback” from students and even parents of students, when trying to enforce their rules. Passing a statewide law would provide legal reinforcement for the lesson stable owner’s or trainer’s own rules/requirements.

It is sometimes believed that equestrians are an elite demographic. A 2023 study by the American Horse Council revealed, however, that 45% of horse owners and 67% of non-horse owning mounted participants and unmounted enthusiasts (e.g., riding lesson students, trail riding business clients, competition riders and spectators etc.), nationally, have annual household incomes under \$100,000. 42% of owners and enthusiasts had household incomes under \$50,000. This means that, in many cases, the medical expenses and long term care of those children who suffer brain injuries may ultimately fall on the taxpayers.

We support the amendments being offered that make clear that the helmet requirement does apply to mounted occupational, physical and/or speech therapy. An exception is provided for cases when a rider is receiving therapy services from a licensed medical provider and the use of an alternative helmet is necessary or appropriate.

At least two other states, Florida and New York, already have helmet laws for minors in effect. Florida passed the law in 2009 and New York in 2013. In both states, the legislation was reportedly introduced in response to a horse-related head injury death of a minor. Let’s not let this be the case in Maryland.

We urge the Committee to give SB 42 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL
(844) MDHORSE (844-634-6773)
info@mdhorsecouncil.org