



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 31st, 2024

Senate Bill 42: Vehicle Laws - Horse Riding - Helmet Requirement for Minors

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, Members of the Committee,

SB 42 is a public safety and a public health bill that establishes a requirement for minors to wear a helmet when riding a horse under certain circumstances.

You will remember this legislation from last year when the committee voted **unanimously** in favor when it came over from the House late in session.

You may also remember that the bill received some questions from Senator Jennings on the floor last year, and we ran out of time before we could address them appropriately.

Over the interim, Delegate Lehman worked with Senator Jennings to address his concerns. Delegate Lehman's team and advocates worked with Senator Jennings over the interim to make the necessary changes to better protect Maryland's youth riders while also allowing appropriate flexibility on private property.

This legislation requires minors to wear a helmet when riding horses on specific property. This includes highways, a public horse-riding path or trail, and the grounds of a facility that solicits or offers educational, recreational, or competitive equestrian activities.

There is a sponsor amendment to this bill to address therapy incorporating equine movement. The amendment ensures that children who are receiving occupational, physical and/or speech therapy incorporating equine movement as a treatment strategy, and are able to wear the standard safety helmet, are required to do so.

For children receiving therapy services from a licensed medical provider for whom the use of an alternative helmet is necessary and appropriate, a helmet in compliance with the provisions of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International's Guidelines for Alternative Helmet Use must be used.

Children with disabilities participating in adaptive (sometimes called therapeutic) horseback riding lessons are already covered by the language of the section referring to educational and recreational purposes, since that is the purpose of their riding.

This bill is critical to protecting Maryland's youth because research shows that head injuries are the most common cause of prolonged hospitalization and death due to horseback riding. In fact, 39% of all riding injuries occur in riders under 19, with the risk of severe injury higher than in

sports such as American football. As many as 21% of young riders are injured in a given year—and 25% of lethal sports injuries in children are caused by horseback riding.

Concussions and other types of traumatic brain injury prevention are receiving significant attention in sports overall, but it is especially important to minimize these injuries in children, given their potential for life-altering consequences for both the victim and their family. A *Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation* study of the long-term outcome of equestrian injuries in children found that 41% of 100 respondents who were treated in a hospital over a 5-year period were still experiencing various disabilities 4 years post-injury.

By considering and voting to advance this bill, we will be doing our legislative duty to protect young Marylanders. Thank you for your consideration. I urge a favorable report on SB42.