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Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 237-Vehicle Laws-Protective Headgear Requirement for Motorcycle Riders-Exception

To the Honorable William C. Smith, Jr. and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am hopeful that this testimony will provide you with a perspective of helmet choice for adult motorcyclists which you may not have previously taken into consideration. I have had the honor and privilege on numerous occasions of testifying, both orally and written, in front of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee as a Maryland citizen in support of helmet choice. I now submit my testimony as a resident of the neighboring state of Pennsylvania.

I spent the first 62 years of my life as a Maryland resident and was proud of my state. However, with retirement looming my wife and I had to make a decision as to where we would spend our retirement years. There were three main criteria which drove our decision. One of those three was that the state we moved to had to have helmet choice. Pennsylvania met our criteria.

To someone who isn't involved with motorcycling that may seem to be an exaggeration. It is not. Several people I know, including past State Director of ABATE of Maryland Michele Holcomb and her husband, had that as a factor in choosing their retirement home. While it is true that the number of people who move out of Maryland who have that as a factor is minimal it shows how strongly some people feel about this subject.

I would also like to point out how this issue affects the tourism dollars for Maryland. I have been riding long enough to remember when Maryland had helmet choice and Pennsylvania was helmet mandatory. During those years there were establishments in Maryland near the Mason-Dixon Line that thrived on motorcyclists from Pennsylvania stopping at their business for a meal before donning their helmets and returning to Pennsylvania. I remember the parking lot of the Maryland Line Inn on York Road, just a stone's throw from the state line, being packed with motorcycles. Now the reverse is true.

I live only one mile from the state line on one of the popular roads riders use to get from Harford County Maryland into York County Pennsylvania and could not tell you, from glancing at tags while in my yard, how many Maryland riders I see on a nice weekend. I am not saying all the bikes are from Maryland but the number that are is sizable. I referenced the Maryland Line Inn early and will tell you that the Peach Bottom Inn and Delta Family Diner are now the ones reaping the tourism dollars from Maryland riders. Both of those establishments are about one mile north of the state line and are a popular stop to rest and refresh before being forced to put a helmet back on and cross into Maryland.

That is just in my area. Imagine this happening all across the state and it does. Now, let's imagine that this bill becomes law and riders, not only Maryland riders but visitors as well, had freedom of choice. Many Maryland riders would stay in Maryland, riders from Pennsylvania would not stop at the border but would continue on into Maryland, and for an added tourism benefit many riders from Virginia, West Virginia, and Delaware (which is also a choice state which sees many Maryland riders) would head to Maryland to enjoy the freedom.

If you are not a rider you may not have a full appreciation of how strongly helmet choice enters into many riders decisions about where to ride and where to spend their tourism dollars and in some cases where to spend their retirement dollars. Please, when deciding your vote on this bill, consider not only the positive aspect of restoring a freedom to a segment of society but the positive financial aspects to the state. Opponents of helmet choice bills always predict a bloodbath on the streets and financial gloom and doom from helmetless riders. They would prefer you act on their emotional pleas and cherry picked statistics and ignore the positives of this bill. It seems to me the positives must outweigh the negatives or 31 states would not still have helmet choice.

As a current Pennsylvanian, and former Marylander, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on Senate Bill 237 so that I, and thousands of others, may enjoy the same freedom in Maryland that we enjoy in Pennsylvania.

Respectfully,

Steven P. Strohmier