

Testimony on HB713 ("Horse Riding - Helmet Requirement for Minors")

I am Barbara Sollner-Webb-Webb (17200 Melbourne Dr, Laurel MD), a life-time Maryland resident and a small farm owner who loves to enjoy Maryland's beautiful green areas by trail riding on my sweet horses. I am a long-time active member of Trail Riders of Today ("TROT"), a 42-year-old nonprofit organized under the laws of Maryland that is dedicated to advancing equestrian trail riding, trails and open spaces.

Today I am speaking for TROT's well over 200 Maryland members to convey that we strongly support HB713. It is important legislation and seems a brilliant public health initiative.

Almost every equestrian has had, or knows someone who had, a "freak accident" where possible serious brain injury was averted or at least minimized due to the rider wearing a helmet. [I personally would likely have been permanently impaired if not for the protection from my helmet in a bad horse accident ages ago.] For decades, TROT required that helmets be worn by everyone who participates in a TROT-sponsored trail ride or other mounted event. TROT has also encouraged all members to wear a helmet whenever they are out riding and to urge their family and friends wear them too, especially minors. According to a recent UCONN Animal Science study, helmets can reduce the possibility of death by head injury by 70-80% (<<https://animalscience.uconn.edu/equine/helmet-safety.php>>). Indeed, a recent TROT membership survey reaffirmed that our members strongly favor requiring helmets for all riders, with well over 90% membership support for requiring helmets by minor riders.

Parenthetically, while TROT strongly supports legislation requiring helmets for all minors riding horses on public land and would be pleased if it would also apply to riding on private land, we fear some individuals may resist such a requirement for private land, so would be more comfortable if HB713 were clarified with an amendment adding the word "public" to the phrase "a horse riding path" in (c)(2)(I)2.

To help protect Maryland's youths from suffering a serious brain injury when riding horses on public lands, please pass HB713.

Thank you for your time and attention.