

2021 / 2022 Director

Ken Eaton

2022 / 2022 County Representatives

Caroline: Jeff Kinnamon

Dorchester: John Knox

Queen Anne's: Marianne Jackson

Talbot: Jimmy Mountzalia



*Dedicated to Freedom of the Road &  
Responsible Motorcycle Legislation*

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To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Chairman and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Ken Eaton, Director, Mid-Shore Chapter

Date: March 14, 2022

Re: SB745 - Vehicle Laws – Protective Headgear Requirement for Motorcycle Riders – Exception

Position: **FAVORABLE: DOES SUPPORT**

I am a motorcyclist, car enthusiast, a farmer, a registered voter, and a member of ABATE of Maryland, Inc., the largest motorcyclist rights organization in the state of Maryland. As motorcyclists, many of us own multiple vehicles of all types. We have motorcycles, trucks, cars, tractors, trailers, etc. ABATE represents the approximately 114,000 on road motorcycles that are registered in Maryland. We have chapters throughout the state and our members include a diverse cross-section of motorcycle riders in Maryland. We overwhelmingly **SUPPORT SB745** as it allows adult, trained motorcycle riders, the Freedom of Choice when it comes to helmets.

The best way to not be involved in an accident is to avoid them. ABATE of Maryland, Inc. is immensely proud of our involvement throughout the years with the Motorcycle Safety Program. Education and training are the primary tools for motorcycle safety. In addition, we work closely with other state motorcycle rights organizations, the American Motorcyclist Association, and the Motorcycle Riders Foundation. ABATE has been around nationwide since 1972 and Maryland started their state motorcycle rights organization in 1974. We have been actively involved in protecting the rights of motorcyclists for 48 years in Maryland. We were heavily involved in 1976 when the Federal government created incentives to pass mandatory helmet laws. Unfortunately, the freedom of choice was lost in 1992 in Maryland. Many of our members, including myself, remember enjoying the Freedom of Choice in Maryland prior to that date. ABATE has been on the forefront ever since fighting to regain Freedom of Choice. In addition, we investigate any legislation that could affect motorcyclists.

### **US States Helmet Laws**

- 2 states are completely Freedom of Choice
- 29 states are Freedom of Choice for riders over a certain age (generally 18 to 21)
- 19 states are not free to decide

In summary, 31 states (62%) provide motorcycle riders with a Freedom of Choice regarding helmets. Currently our neighbors to the north and east are Freedom of Choice states. Many riders in Maryland choose to ride in those states whenever they can to enjoy their freedoms and spend their money while enjoying those Freedoms. Conversely, many riders from those 31 states avoid Maryland when possible.

State Website: [www.abateofmdinc.org](http://www.abateofmdinc.org)

Email: [abatemidshore@gmail.com](mailto:abatemidshore@gmail.com)

There are over 426,000 motorcycles registered in Pennsylvania and Delaware. Maryland is telling quite a few of those motorcyclists that your Freedom of Choice in your home state is not welcome here. That does not include the approximately 4 million+ other motorcyclists from other Freedom of Choice states that will not be provided that Freedom here in Maryland. When these motorcyclists visit in a state, they spend money on gas, tolls, eat in restaurants, visit local businesses, stop at hotels, campgrounds, B &B's. In short, THEY SPEND MONEY. I personally know many motorcyclists from Pennsylvania that will travel through Delaware to get to the Maryland beaches, just to avoid the majority of Maryland on their trip. That is TOURISM DOLLARS LOST. Gas stations, restaurants, businesses, and small towns along the route in Maryland are losing out, because Maryland refuses to allow Freedom of Choice.

Regarding the "public health burden" argument that others have presented year after year, there are 31 other states that allow Freedom of Choice and we have not seen them go into financial distress over un-helmeted motorcyclists.

Many motorcyclists are not just local riders. There are a substantial number of riders that have ridden in the majority of the states. They continually express their feelings over the right to decide and enjoy the Freedom of Choice. This law will not prevent anyone from wearing a helmet if they decide to do so. However, it will allow the rider to make his or her own decision.

This bill provides Maryland riders the Freedom of Choice that is enjoyed by 31 other states. It also allows riders from other states that same Freedom. The Mid-Shore Chapter of ABATE of Maryland, Inc **SUPPORTS SB745** - Vehicle Laws – Protective Headgear Requirement for Motorcycle Riders – Exception. We urge the committee to consider a **FAVORABLE** vote, in support of our Freedom of Choice.

Thank you!



Kenneth B. Eaton, Director  
Mid-Shore Chapter  
ABATE of Maryland, Inc.