



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 22, 2024

The Honorable William C. Smith Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller, Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Senate Bill 503 - Vehicle Laws-Protective Headgear Requirement-Exception (In Remembrance of Gary “Pappy” Boward) – Oppose

Dear Chair Smith and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) respectfully opposes Senate Bill (SB) 503 - “Vehicle Laws- Protective Headgear Requirement- Exception (In Remembrance of Gary “Pappy” Boward)”. SB 503 would exempt an individual from wearing protective headgear when operating a motorcycle if the individual is at least 21 years old and (1) licensed to operate a motorcycle for at least two years, (2) has completed an approved motorcycle rider safety course, or (3) is a passenger on a motorcycle operated by a rider exempt under (1) or (2).

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that protective headgear such as helmets saved the lives of 1,872 motorcyclists in 2017.¹ In Maryland alone, helmets saved an estimated 43 lives in 2017.¹ According to NHTSA’s National Center for Statistics and Analysis, protective headgear is approximately 37% effective in preventing fatalities to motorcyclists.² Furthermore, motorcycle helmet use can reduce the risk of traumatic brain injury (TBI) up to 69%.³

A universal helmet law is by far the most effective method for preventing motorcyclist injuries and fatalities.⁴ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “On average states with universal helmet laws save eight times more lives per 100,000 motorcycle registrations each year compared to states without a helmet law and save three times more lives per 100,000 motorcycle registrations each year compared to states with a partial helmet law,”⁵ requiring only specific groups to wear helmets. In 2020, NHTSA reported that there were 5.2 times as many motorcyclist fatalities in states without a universal helmet law compared to states with universal helmet laws.⁶

In addition to the human toll taken in deaths and injuries, motorcycle crashes carry a sizable financial cost to society. The CDC reported that in 2020, national medical costs from motorcycle-related fatalities totaled \$81 million, while medical costs from nonfatal injuries totaled \$6.44 billion.⁷ According to CDC, motorcycle fatalities cost Maryland \$106 million in 2018 (14% of the total cost for all motor vehicle crashes).⁸

Maryland's universal motorcycle helmet law is an effective public health strategy aimed at significantly reducing motorcycle-related injuries and fatalities. Rolling back the law with exemptions will result in increased serious injuries and deaths along with increased economic costs.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

¹ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019). Lives saved in 2017 by restraint use and minimum-drinking-age laws (Traffic Safety Facts Crash*Stats. Report No. DOT HS 812 683). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812683>

² National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019). Lives and costs saved by motorcycle helmets, 2017. Traffic Safety Facts Crash*Stats (Report No. DOT HS 812 867). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812867>

³ Liu BC, Ivers R, Norton R, Boufous S, Blows S, Lo SK, Helmets for preventing injury in motorcycle riders (Review), The Cochrane Library, Issue 1, 2009. Available online at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004333.pub3/abstract>

⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *Motorcycle safety: How to save lives and save money*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (U.S.). Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S.). <http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pdf/mc2012/MotorcycleSafetyBook.pdf>

⁵ Governor Highway Safety Association. (2018). *Motorcyclist Traffic fatalities by state: 2017 preliminary data*. Washington, DC: Governors Highway Safety Association

⁶ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (May, 2022). *Motorcycles: 2020 data* (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 306). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) {cited 2023 Feb 21}. Available from: www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Motor Vehicle Crash Deaths: Costly But Preventable*. Maryland. https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/pdf/statecosts/2020/CDC-Cost-of-Crash-Deaths-Fact-Sheets_Maryland.pdf