



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

February 4, 2025

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

**RE: Senate Bill (SB) 397 – Motorcycles - Protective Headgear Requirement - Exception
(In Remembrance of Gary "Pappy" Boward) – Letter of Opposition**

Dear Chair Smith and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of opposition for Senate Bill (SB) 397 – Motorcycles - Protective Headgear Requirement - Exception (In Remembrance of Gary "Pappy" Boward). SB 397 would establish an exception to the prohibition against operating or riding on a motorcycle without certain protective headgear if the individual is at least 21 years old, and/or (1) licensed to operate a motorcycle for at least two years, (2) has completed a motorcycle rider safety course approved by the Administrator or the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, or (3) is a passenger on a motorcycle operated by an individual described in (1) or (2) of this exemption.

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

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>

A universal helmet law is 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 which only require specific groups to wear helmets. In 2020, NHTSA reported that there were about five times more 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. In 2022, the CDC reported that combined costs (i.e., medical, loss of work, loss of quality of life, etc.) for nonfatal motorcycle crash injuries in the U.S. was over \$27 billion for hospitalizations and \$15 billion for emergency department visits.⁷ According to the CDC, motorcycle fatalities alone cost Maryland approximately \$873 million in 2022, based on medical costs and the total value of statistical life.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 to only cover riders under 21 years old will result in increased serious injuries and deaths along with substantial 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott".

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

⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). *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.). <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/5974>

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]. {accessed 2025 Jan 30}. Available from: www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars

⁸Ibid.