



ABATE OF MARYLAND, INC.

Dedicated to Freedom of the Road & Responsible Motorcycle Legislation Since 1974

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

From: Ken Eaton, Director, Executive Director, ABATE of Maryland, Inc.

Date: January 26, 2026

Re: **SB195** - Vehicle Laws - Protective Headgear Requirement - Exception (In Remembrance of Gary "Pappy" Boward)

Position: **FAVORABLE: SUPPORT**

I am a lifelong resident of the Eastern Shore, born in Talbot County and currently residing in Queen Anne's County. I have worked in Maryland for over 40 years and have spent nearly four decades riding "miles of smiles" across 30 different states.

I offer this information to you today, not just as an individual, but as a representative of ABATE of Maryland, Inc., a volunteer organization representing the interests of over 100,000 registered on-road motorcyclists in our state.

Who We Are: A Diverse Cross-Section of Maryland There is an outdated stereotype of what a "biker" looks like. The reality of 2026 is that the motorcycling community is a direct reflection of Maryland's diverse population.

Demographics: Our members and the riding public include Marylanders of every race, gender, and background. We are seeing significant growth in ridership among African American, Hispanic, and female demographics.

Professionals: We are blue-collar workers, white-collar executives, active military, and veterans. We are Elks, Masons, Shriners, and community volunteers.

Financial Stability: Motorcycling is not an inexpensive hobby. With bikes costing between \$5,000 and \$50,000 (and some touring models exceeding \$100,000), riders are financially invested. Consequently, the vast majority of riders carry private health insurance, rendering the "social burden" argument largely obsolete.

The Fiscal Reality: Debunking the "Social Burden" Opponents of this bill often cite potential costs to the state. However, the 2025 Fiscal Policy note for this legislation stated that "any impact of Medicaid expenditures and federal fund revenues is assumed to be negligible."

Furthermore, when we look at the hard data regarding trauma costs, motorcyclists are often unfairly singled out compared to other road users who are not mandated to wear protective gear. According to CDC WISCARS data and *Maryland injury statistics*:

Comparative Medical Costs (Maryland)

Total Annual Medical Costs for Pedestrian Injury Crashes: ~\$248.3 Million

Total Annual Medical Costs for Motorcycle Crashes: ~\$85.6 Million

Pedestrian-related medical costs in Maryland are 2.9 times higher than motorcycle-related costs. Yet, we do not mandate helmets for pedestrians, bicyclists, or convertible drivers. If the goal is solely to reduce state medical expenditures, the current mandate is selectively applied to only one group: motorcyclists.

The Economic Impact: Tourism Dollars Leaving Maryland and is currently an "island" of restriction.

33 States currently offer some form of Freedom of Choice regarding helmets.

Our Neighbors: Both Pennsylvania and Delaware are Freedom of Choice states.

Riders are akin to tourists; we spend money on fuel, food, lodging, and entertainment. Currently, thousands of riders from the Mid-Atlantic bypass Maryland to ride in Delaware and Pennsylvania where they have the freedom to choose. When riders travel to major events—such as Daytona (FL), Sturgis (SD), or Laconia (NH)—they plan routes that avoid mandatory helmet states. Maryland is losing these tourism dollars to our neighbors every single day.

The Philosophy of Choice: We are not asking to make helmets illegal. We are asking to restore the Freedom of Choice for adult, experienced riders.

Inconsistency: We allow adults to make choices about risks in almost every other aspect of life—from smoking and diet to riding bicycles or driving convertibles.

Safety Limitations: A helmet protects only about 17% of the body. In an accident, the torso, spine, and extremities remain exposed. Riders accept these inherent risks every time they start their engines.

Equipment: Most of us wear boots, jeans, and gloves for protection. Some choose full gear; others choose less. This decision should belong to the rider, not the state.

Conclusion: We are asking Maryland to join the 33 other states that respect the intelligence and liberty of their riding citizens. The data shows the fiscal impact is negligible, the "social burden" is overstated compared to other groups, and the economic loss in tourism is real.

We urge the committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on SB 195.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

There is some interesting data in the attached "Traffic Crash & Injury Data" document, updated in January 2026. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us to discuss.

Thank you!



Kenneth B. Eaton, Executive Director

ABATE of Maryland, Inc.

Tel: 410-263-9185 (office)

Tel: 410-924-3374 (mobile)