



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D., Secretary

January 28, 2026

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

RE: Senate Bill 195 – 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 respectfully submits this letter of opposition for Senate Bill (SB) 195 – Motorcycles - Protective Headgear Requirement - Exception (In Remembrance of Gary "Pappy" Boward). SB 195 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 either (1) has been 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, 2008.

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 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, over 22,000 motorcyclist deaths would have been prevented over a 46-year time span (1976-2022) if all states had universal helmet laws.⁵ In 2023, NHTSA reported the highest number of motorcycle fatalities across the United States in nearly 50 years, and 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 2023, the CDC reported that combined costs (including medical, work loss, and quality of life loss) for nonfatal motorcycle crash injuries in the U.S. were \$29.66B for hospitalizations and \$16.55B for emergency department visits.⁷ According to the CDC, motorcycle fatalities cost Maryland a total of \$896.7M in 2023, a \$23M increase from the year prior. The calculation of the total cost of motorcycle fatalities is based on medical costs and the total value of statistical life.⁸

Maryland's universal motorcycle helmet law is an effective public health strategy that has significantly reduced 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 Meghan Lynch, Director of Governmental Affairs at meghan.lynch@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D.
Secretary

⁴ Centers 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 Teoh, E. R. (2025). The human cost of allowing unhelmeted motorcycling in the United States. *Journal of Safety Research*, 93, 292–297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2025.03.002>

⁶ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (July, 2025). *Motorcycles: 2023 data* (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 732). 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

⁸ Ibid.