



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



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UNFAVORABLE: In Opposition to Senate Bill 195

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) is an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, public health and law enforcement groups and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs. The Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) is the premier professional nursing association dedicated to defining the future of emergency nursing through advocacy, education, research, innovation, and leadership. The Skilled Motorcyclist Association - Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc. (SMARTER) is a non-profit association dedicated to increasing motorcyclist safety by compiling and disseminating data-driven research to support decision makers in implementing effective strategies. Our organizations thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony jointly in opposition to Senate Bill (SB) 195, legislation that would repeal Maryland's all-rider motorcycle helmet use law. This critical safety law has been preventing deaths and injuries and saving taxpayer dollars in Maryland for nearly 34 years. To repeal the all-rider motorcycle helmet use law would be a deadly and costly mistake.

Motor Vehicle Crash Fatalities Remain Historically High, Including Riders of Motorcycles, the Most Hazardous Form of Motor Vehicle Transportation.¹

In 2023, 6,335² motorcyclists were killed in the U.S., the highest number of fatalities on record.³ An estimated additional 82,564 motorcyclists were injured in the same year.⁴ Early estimates for 2024 indicate a two percent decrease in motorcyclist fatalities compared to 2023.⁵ Despite this projection, the number of motorcycle crash fatalities in 2023 is nearly three times the historic low of 2,116 motorcycle crash deaths in 1997.⁶ Motorcycle riders are nearly 28 times more likely to die in a crash than passenger vehicle occupants.⁷ Data show that dangerous driving behaviors, including speeding, alcohol-impairment and driver distraction, continue to contribute to deadly outcomes, especially for vulnerable road users (VRU), including motorcycle riders, who lack the protective structure of a passenger vehicle.

Traffic safety is a serious issue that requires improvement rather than the dismantling of the state's all-rider motorcycle helmet use law, a proven traffic safety countermeasure. On Maryland roadways, 89 motorcyclists lost their lives in 2023, a 29 percent increase since 2014.⁸ In 2024, there were an overall estimated 579⁹ traffic fatalities in Maryland, which is an 11 percent increase from 2015 to 2024.¹⁰

Motorcycle Helmet Use, Bolstered by All-Rider Helmet Laws, is a Proven Lifesaver.

Research affirms motorcycle helmet use saves lives and prevents injuries. According to a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets are the only strategy proven to be effective in reducing motorcyclist fatalities.¹¹ Motorcycle helmet use reduces the risk of head injury by 69 percent and reduce the risk of death by 42 percent.¹² The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that helmet use saved the lives of 1,872 motorcycle riders in 2017 (the latest year data is available) and that 749 more lives in all states could have been saved if all motorcycle riders had worn helmets.¹³ After Maryland enacted its all-rider motorcycle helmet law in 1992, the motorcyclist death rate (per 10,000 registered motorcycles) from crashes dropped 56 percent over a five-year period.¹⁴

State laws requiring all riders to wear helmets are extremely effective in achieving helmet use. Data released from NHTSA show that in states with all-rider helmet use laws, use of helmets compliant with federal standards is 83 percent, compared to just 66 percent in states without such a law.¹⁵ According to NHTSA, in 2023, there were 8.6 times as many unhelmeted fatalities (1,937 fatalities) in states without a universal helmet use law compared to states with a universal helmet law (225 fatalities).¹⁶ These states were similar with respect to total resident populations.¹⁷ An analysis from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) calculated that between 1976 and 2022, over 22,000 additional lives could have been saved if all states had enacted all-rider motorcycle helmet laws.¹⁸ The data are clear – Maryland’s all-rider helmet requirement is working to ensure motorcycle helmet use and the safety of motorcycle riders.

Motor Vehicle Crashes, Especially Involving Motorcycles, are Costly to All Marylanders. Helmet Use Reduces Preventable Expenditures.

Traffic crashes impose a physical, emotional and financial toll on Maryland families. In 2019, the cost of crashes in Maryland surpassed \$5.9 billion – essentially resulting in a “crash tax” on each Marylander of \$977.¹⁹ When updated for inflation alone, in 2025, costs would equate to \$7.5 billion to the state.²⁰

Annually, motorcycle rider crashes cost nearly \$17 billion in economic impacts and \$107 billion in societal harm as measured by comprehensive costs based on 2019 data.²¹ Accounting for inflation alone, in 2025, this would equate to over \$21 billion in economic impacts, and over \$135 billion in societal harm.²² Serious injuries and fatalities accounted for 83 percent of total comprehensive costs of motorcyclist crashes, compared to 60 percent of the total comprehensive costs of all motor vehicle crashes.²³ Traumatic brain injury is a serious, potentially life-long injury that can result from a motorcyclist crash, especially when the rider is not wearing a helmet. In addition to changes in social, cognitive and physical ability, costs for lifetime care for a traumatic brain injury can easily amount to millions of dollars.

Conversely, in 2019, motorcycle helmet use prevented \$21.2 billion in societal harm costs, but another \$9.4 billion could have been prevented if all motorcycle riders had worn helmets.²⁴ Updating for inflation only, in 2025 this would equate to \$26.8 billion in societal harm prevented and over \$11.9 billion if all riders had worn helmets.²⁵ Helmet use reduces the cost of medical treatment, length of hospital stay and probability of long-term disability for those riders injured in crashes. The provisions in SB 195 to ostensibly alleviate the risks posed by riders and their passengers riding without a helmet, specifying the exception is for those age 21 and older, mandating two years riding experience and passing a safety course, fail to mitigate the severe and serious damages that will be caused by repealing the state’s all-rider motorcycle helmet use law. Further, there is no scientific evidence that motorcycle rider training reduces crash risk and is an adequate substitute for an all-rider helmet law. Such a law is also unenforceable for reasons addressed below.

All Rider Motorcycle Helmet Use Law Repeals Have Resulted in Increased Deaths, Injuries and Associated Costs.

The efficacy of all-rider helmet use laws is proven by the tragic consequences in states that have repealed all-rider helmet use laws. After repeal of their state’s universal helmet requirement, the motorcyclist fatality rate increased 35 percent in Florida, 50 percent in Kentucky and 100 percent in Louisiana.²⁶ In Michigan, which repealed its all-rider helmet use law in 2012, there would have been 26 fewer motorcyclist deaths (a 21 percent reduction) that year if the law was still in place.²⁷ More recently in Missouri, motorcyclist fatalities increased 26 percent from 123 in 2019, prior to repeal, to 166 in 2021, the first full year without the law and remained elevated in 2022.²⁸ Nebraska’s repeal took effect in 2024, and preliminary state data shows a 32 percent increase in motorcyclist fatalities relative to the five-year average.²⁹

“Minors only” helmet laws, such as SB 195 seeks to enact, are ineffective and unenforceable. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, in states with weak youth-specific helmet laws, use decreased and youth mortality increased. Serious traumatic brain injury among youth was 38 percent higher in states with age-specific laws compared to states with all-rider helmet use laws.³⁰ After Florida repealed its all-rider helmet use law in 2000, deaths of riders under the age of 21 who were not helmeted increased 188 percent, even though the law still applied to them.³¹ Enforcing laws for only young riders is problematic since it is very difficult, if not impossible in certain roadway environments, for law enforcement to estimate a rider’s age. It is also impossible to determine training or length of experience operating a motorcycle in such circumstances.

The Public is Concerned about Roadway Safety and Supports All-Rider Helmet Laws.

A public opinion poll commissioned by Advocates found that overwhelming majorities of respondents were “extremely” or “very” concerned about dangerous driving behaviors and scenarios.³² Further, the American public understands the need for all-rider helmet laws and overwhelmingly supports them as demonstrated by the American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation Traffic Safety Culture Index, which found more than four in five Americans (82 percent) support a law requiring all motorcycle riders to wear a helmet.³³ Removing basic safety protections, including Maryland’s all-rider helmet law, runs contrary to public opinion.

If SB 195 is passed, it will result in increased deaths, injuries and financial burden on Maryland’s emergency services and hospitals and ultimately, every Maryland taxpayer. **Advocates, ENA Maryland State Council and SMARTER urge you to oppose SB 195.** Thank you.

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