



MARYLAND  
**HORSE**  
COUNCIL

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*One Common Bond: The Horse*  
*One Common Voice: The Horse Council*

In the House Environment & Transportation Committee, February 2, 2023

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 20

Vehicle Laws – Horse Riding – Helmet Requirement for Minors - **FAVORABLE**

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The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

There are numerous reasons why this is a good bill:

- Seventy percent of all reported equestrian fall accidents resulted in a head injury, of which 91% were concussions.
- Head injuries account for 18 percent of emergency room injuries among equestrians.
- Medical Examiner reports show that 60% or more of horse-related deaths are caused by head injuries. Helmets can reduce this possibility by 70-80%.
- The American Medical Equestrian Association calculates that ASTM approved helmets have reduced all riding-related head injuries by 30% and severe head injuries by 50%.
- Head injuries are the most common reason for horse-related hospital admissions.  
([https://sportsmedicine-open.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40798-019-0193-0#:~:text=Injuries%20reported%20for%20undamaged%20helmets,diffuse%20axonal%20injury%20\(DAI\)](https://sportsmedicine-open.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40798-019-0193-0#:~:text=Injuries%20reported%20for%20undamaged%20helmets,diffuse%20axonal%20injury%20(DAI);); [https://vtx.vt.edu/videos/k/2021/10/1\\_dtsg3mj7.html](https://vtx.vt.edu/videos/k/2021/10/1_dtsg3mj7.html);  
<https://equusmagazine.com/riding/riding-helmet-facts/>)
- Many horse organizations in Maryland, including Pony Clubs and horse show/competition associations and venues already support and promote helmet safety and require that minors and adults wear ASTM approved helmets at all times while mounted. Many lesson stables do, as well, frequently required by insurance carriers, though some report receiving “pushback” from students and even parents of students, when trying to enforce their rules. Passing a statewide law would provide legal reinforcement for the lesson stable owner’s or trainer’s own rules/requirements.

In addition, Dr. Erica Gaertner, a primary care sports medicine specialist at LifeBridge Health Sports Medicine Institute; Team Physician for Loyola University Maryland; and Medical Director of the National Steeplechase Association is out of the country but has submitted a letter in support of this bill, which is included in our written materials.

At least two other states, Florida and New York, already have helmet laws for minors in effect. Florida passed the law in 2009 and New York in 2013. In both states, the legislation was reportedly introduced in response to a horse-related head injury death of a minor. Let's not let this be the case in Maryland.

We urge the Committee to give HB 20 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

**THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL**  
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