

Gretchen Butts, Maryland

- BS and MS in Nursing; MA in Business Management/Human Resources
- Primary Care Nurse Practitioner (BS and MS in Nursing) and spent 25 years practicing as an Adult/Internal Medicine Nurse Practitioner while gaining vast experience in the Olympic Equestrian sport of Eventing.
- Past and current committee work for the United States Eventing Association and United States Equestrian Federation, including work on the Safety, Licensed Officials and Competitions committees.
- Past member of the USEA Board of Governors and USEA Vice President of Education.
- Current Level 3 FEI International Eventing Technical Delegate and Eventing Judge, USEF Equestrian Eventing S Technical Delegate and Eventing Judge
- International Technical Official at the 2008 Olympic Games, Assistant Technical Delegate for the 2010 World Equestrian Games.
- Highest ranking Eventing Official in Maryland
- Experienced Eventing competitor for over 40 years through the highest level of International Eventing.

- Personal recreational pursuits include running, alpine hiking and many years sailing with husband Robert on the Chesapeake.
- Family: 2 adult daughters-- Steph, USEA ICP Level 2 instructor and graduate A Pony Clubber with experience thru International competition levels. She is part of the Waredaca staff, business team and co-owner of the Waredaca Brewing Company. Youngest daughter, Devon, is a licensed Doctor of Physical Therapy, currently practicing in Chicago.

I was invited to address everyone today as to the issue of minors wearing helmets. Quite honestly, I was **astonished** to find that this was not an active rule. To me, this is a ‘no brainer’ and an issue that needs immediate attention and change. Why....because..

Horseback riding is a very dangerous activity!!

Horseback riding carries greater risk for minors than motorcycle racing, cycling, football and skiing. The fact that helmet use substantially lessens the risk of life-threatening injuries and death is very well documented. Regretfully, equestrian helmet legislation often is the result of these tragic accidents where injuries could have been lessened and lives saved if only equestrian helmets were worn. Many states and all of the national and international equestrian organizations mandate helmet use at all times when minors are mounted on a horse.

You have the ability to effect this change in our state where the horse industry is HUGE. Horses are big business that not only provides a

significant economic stamp and includes world class equestrian competition. Horseback riding is a very popular recreational activity that many Marylanders young and old thrive on.

Think of the impact and outcome that one horrific accident of a child, followed by the personal details of that child and family adding to this tragedy of a child falling off a horse while not wearing a helmet to have everyone questioning why a helmet was not worn.

Summary points

- Helmets are underutilized in equestrian riding activities and while guidelines have been developed for competitive activities, change has been slow to reach all types of recreational equestrian activities
- Riding culture, peer pressure and social media often discourages minor riders to always wear a helmet when mounted
- This is problematic, knowing the incidence of concussion in equestrian injury is double that of many other high-impact sports in which minors participate.
- I URGE you, as lawmakers, to make a difference NOW, knowing with absolute certainty you will lessen risks and save lives in doing so!