



2023 SESSION

BILL: HB 20 - Vehicle Laws – Horse Riding – Helmet Requirement for Minors

COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support (As Amended)

BILL ANALYSIS: HB 20 prohibits an adult who is directly supervising a minor from allowing the minor to ride a horse unless the minor is wearing a properly secured helmet that meets certain standards. An individual who violates this bill will be subject to a maximum \$500 fine under the Maryland Vehicle Law.

POSITION RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) supports HB 20 and has no objection to the amendment made in the House. HB 20 ensures that minors are protected against life-altering brain damage or head injury by mandating minors to wear a secured helmet when horseback riding.¹ Equestrian sports are the most common cause of sports-related brain injury in the United States. Horseback riding carries a higher injury rate than both football and motorcycle racing. Maryland’s universal helmet rule requires all motorcyclists and children riding bicycles to wear a helmet—the same standard for horseback riding would protect Maryland children and teens from serious brain or head injury. New York and Florida have decades-long statewide helmet statutes, and California and Washington have enacted helmet ordinances in specific municipalities.²

According to the Centers for Disease Control National Center for Injury Prevention, over 100,000 horse riding-related accidents occur each year in the United States. It is estimated that 50,000 emergency room visits annually are due to horseback riding injuries.³ The most common parts of the body injured during equestrian accidents are the head and neck.⁴ Riders aged 10 to 14 years old are the most likely to be involved in an accident and are at a higher risk for more severe brain injury.¹ A brain injury in childhood can lead to lifelong consequences for both the child and their family.

It has been demonstrated that riding helmets save lives and prevent serious brain injury. The New England Journal of Medicine reported that wearing a helmet reduces head and brain injuries by 85%.¹ Helmets are accessible, cost-effective, and scientifically shown to decrease head injury. This bill has the potential to reduce debilitating injuries and decrease Medicaid and Developmental Disabilities Administration costs. The lifetime cost of acute head injury can be up to \$3 million.⁵

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this letter of support for HB 20. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*

¹ Agarwal, Nitin, and Rut Thakkar Kho Than. "Sports-Related Head Injury." *American Association of Neurological Surgeons*.

² Jurga, Fran. "New York State's Equestrian Helmet Law Amended to Age 18." *EQUUS* (2017).

³ Meredith, Lauren, Robert Ekman, and Robert Thomson. "Horse-Related Incidents and Factors for Predicting Injuries to the Head." *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* 4, no. 1 (2018): e000398.

⁴ Meredith, Lauren, Robert Ekman, and Robert Thomson. "Horse-Related Incidents and Factors for Predicting Injuries to the Head." *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* 4, no. 1 (2018): e000398.

⁵ Edmonds, Chandi. "The Steep Cost of Brain Injury Recovery." Available from <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2015/12/opinion-next-avenue-brain-injury/>.

