



February 15, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment & Transportation Committee
Room 251 - House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 639: Vehicle Laws-Protective Headgear Requirement -- Exception
Letter of Information

Dear Chairman Korman:

I am writing to provide you with information that may be helpful as the Committee considers HB 639. HB 639 exempts a driver of a motorcycle as well as the driver's passenger from wearing protective headgear if the driver is at least age 21, has been licensed for a minimum of two years, and has completed a specified motorcycle safety course.

Maryland's current universal helmet law requires all motorcycle riders to wear eye-protective devices and headgear that meet certain standards. The law was the result of local, state, and national concerns regarding the incidence and severity of head injuries resulting from motorcycle crashes throughout the country and in Maryland.

- Motorcycle head injuries often result in fatalities or life-long disabilities and require intensive and costly inpatient and outpatient treatment and resources.
- The average acute care cost of un-helmeted riders is nearly \$28,000, 32 percent higher than for helmeted riders. See <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/sr/statusreport/article/51/7/2>
- Most patients involved in motorcycle crashes who are treated in Maryland trauma centers are age 21 or older. In FY23, Maryland's trauma centers treated 932 patients involved in motorcycle crashes, 818 of whom were 21 years of age or older. Of these patients, 206 sustained a head injury, 15 of whom subsequently died. Of the 206 riders who sustained head injuries, 159 (77.2%) were wearing a helmet and 47 (22.8%) were not. All 206 head injured patients required treatment and 137 were admitted. Only nine (6.6%) of the admitted patients stayed in the hospital for one day, while 23 of the admitted patients required hospitalization for more than 28 days.
- Helmets have been shown to provide significant protection from head injury for motorcyclists since serious head injury is common among fatally injured motorcyclists. Helmets are about 37 percent effective in preventing motorcycle deaths and about 67 percent effective in preventing brain injuries. <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/motorcycles/fatalityfacts/motorcycles>

- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports in the *NHTSA Five-Year Motorcycle Safety Plan* that 60 percent of motorcyclist fatalities are caused by head injury, and the use of a helmet offers a motorcyclist the best protection from fatal and non-fatal injuries. https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/13507-motorcycle_safety_plan_050919_v8-tag.pdf and see [Motorcycle Safety: Helmets, Motorists, Road Awareness | NHTSA](#).
- Studies have found that helmet use ranges from 85 to 92 percent in universal law states, compared to 29 to 54 percent in partial law states. Motorcyclists who were required to wear a helmet according to their age in partial law states did so only 44 percent of the time. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4779790/>
- The U.S. Department of Transportation has urged manufacturers to provide free or heavily discounted DOT certified helmets or rider safety training with the purchase of every new motorcycle sold in the United States, noting that “...Helmets and proper training are just as important as brakes or headlights when it comes to the well-being of motorcyclists.”

I hope that you find this information helpful as you consider HB 639. Please let me know if you have any questions or if I may provide you with any further information.

Sincerely,



Theodore R. Delbridge, MD, MPH
Executive Director, MIEMSS