

NATIONAL COALITION OF MOTORCYCLISTS



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 10, 1987

Testimony Presented by:
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FACT SHEET

Taken From The Testimony of The
National Coalition of Motorcyclists
September 10, 1987

Since 1975, helmet law advocates have made outlandish predictions of dramatic increases in fatality rates which have never materialized.

Maryland was told they would have a 30 to 40 percent increase in their fatality rate. In reality the fatality rate has remained consistent or declined.

There are many other forms of motorcycle safety such as motorcycle safety programs, share the road programs and improved licensing procedures which show much more promise than mandatory helmet laws.

A helmet can not prevent an accident.

Motorcyclists do not favor mandatory helmet laws. As many as two-thirds to three-fourths favor voluntary use.

Helmet laws have taken on a life of their own and have overshadowed many other safety initiatives which show more promise and public support.

Since 1979, Maryland has been able to pass four bills in the General Assembly which have made improvements and ultimately made permanent its Motorcycle Safety Program.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, my name is Debra Lough, and I am here today representing the National Coalition of Motorcyclists. I reside in Maryland where I am the Legislative Advisor for ABATE of Maryland.

During my testimony, you will hear me referring to Maryland frequently. Because of the comparable riding seasons and proximity of Maryland to Pennsylvania we feel this comparison will more accurately reflect the results of enacting the legislation here before you today, than the speculations of those whom oppose repeal of your mandatory helmet law.

Today you will hear many statistics which would have you believe that repeal of your mandatory helmet law would be the cause of motorcycle deaths in your state of Pennsylvania.

Since 1975, proponents of mandatory helmet laws have presented statistics depicting ever increasing fatality rates for motorcyclists. They would have you believe that this is due to the repeal of helmet laws. They have made outlandish predictions of dramatic increases of deaths which have never materialized.

For example, in Maryland we were told by helmet law supporters that if we were to amend our law, we would see a 30 to 40 percent increase in motorcycle fatalities.

These claims simply were not true. The average number of motorcycle fatalities in Maryland since 1979 is 71. Total fatalities since repeal have fallen below the yearly average 4 times. This downward trend has remained fairly constant with the exception of 1986 where fatalities rose. This might be explained by the fact that the spring and summer of 1986 were extremely dry, as evidenced by 23 Maryland counties applying for drought relief during this period, (you may remember that Pennsylvania came to the rescue of many Maryland farmers by transporting hay into our state), thus indicating an abnormally long dry peak riding season. Couple this with a 16.2 percent increase in total motorcycle registration over the same period, and the 1986 increase does not appear to be a radical departure from the normal.

With respect to 1987, in June of this year our fatalities for the year was nine, as compared with 26 for the same time in 1986. We expect our downward trend to continue. The predictions of our helmet law advocates thankfully never came to pass.

Since 1979 when we repealed our helmet law we have been able to spend more time working with other forms of motorcycle safety including rider education, share the road programs and improving licensing procedures which show vastly more promise and public support than helmet laws. Since we found that each of these can prevent accidents where helmet laws can not they deserve a chance to replace helmet laws at the top of the lists of safety groups and in legislatures.

In Maryland, we have what we like to think is one of the best motorcycle safety programs in the country, because we were able to spend the time to work on improvements almost every year, making our program stronger. Just last year we made our program permanent in the Department of Transportation because of public support and its overall success.

The fact of the matter is that motorcyclists do not favor mandatory helmet laws. Surveys show that anywhere from two-thirds to three-fourths of the respondents favor voluntary helmet use. With this kind of opposition, it is clear that helmet laws have long outlived their usefulness. Helmet laws have taken on a life of their own and have over-shadowed more important safety initiatives. What is needed is a plan which the entire safety community endorses. Until then motorcycle safety will suffer not improve.

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Incidence of Accidents and Fatalities in Motorcycling

For the 9 years ending December 31, 1985.

	<u>Registrations</u>	<u>Accidents</u>	<u>Fatalities</u>
Helmet states	17,312,414	612,899	15,338
Repeal states	<u>28,992,906</u>	<u>880,184</u>	<u>24,936</u>
Totals:	46,305,320	1,493,083	40,274

Accidents and Fatalities per Million Registrations.

	<u>Accidents</u>	<u>Fatalities</u>
Helmet states	35,402 (116.6%)	886 (103.0%)
Repeal states	30,359 (100%)	860 (100%)

Use of helmets is accompanied by a 16.6 per cent greater incidence of accidents and 3 per cent more fatalities.

Data derived from the annual reports of the Motorcycle Safety Foundation which in turn obtains figures from the Departments of Transportation of each state.

A. Ranald Mackenzie M.D.
Founder & Past President, Motorcycling Doctors Association