

Maryland State office holders:

I have been the owner of Light Street Cycles in Federal Hill for over 20 years. My involvement in biking also includes mountain biking, recreational distance rides, and bike commuting through Baltimore City. I spend a lot of my time both at work and otherwise encouraging people to wear a helmet. Many times I succeed, and sometimes I do not. I have absolutely no doubt that the concerns behind this bill are sincere, and that those of you supporting the bill have the very best of intentions. I also might financially benefit from a bill requiring people to wear a helmet while bicycling in Maryland. I am, however, against HB 339.

**Many people who ride their bicycles do so because they have little money for transportation, and some are even homeless.** They might not have the money for a helmet, or they might have to work for some time to save for one. These commuters are penalized all the way: they risk their lives on unsafe streets, and they may be fined for not having the gear they cannot afford.

I speak to this from experience. In the early 2000's, a "zero tolerance" crime policy was adopted that caught a lot of good, hardworking people biking to and from work because they were biking either without a front light or on the sidewalk where they could be safely away from car traffic. Courts and judges were backlogged, and people were needlessly ensnared in the criminal justice system. Police even tried to arrest people for biking without a helmet when no such law existed. Minorities and young commuters were targeted the most.

What I mean to say is that, at some point in time, this law will be misused and the poor and powerless will bear the burden of yet more penalties. In the meantime, those police officers who are inclined to use their authority for authority's sake (rather than for the good of the community) will spend their time and tax-payer's money pursuing bicyclists rather than criminals. **The irony for those of us in Baltimore City is that there is little done to make the streets actually safer for bicyclists, and a helmet law is not going to do that.** Police have often declined to prosecute motorists in accidents with bicycles when the motorist was at fault. (see the cases of Nathan Krasopoler, Jack Yates, and Natasha Pettigrew), and this may give the police more reason to cite bicyclists and ignore the aggressive drivers.

I applaud the well-meaning legislators in their attention to cyclists' safety. I must, however, urge you to please withdraw your support, or urge your colleagues to drop support for HB 339. **The cycling community needs your help in so many ways, and cyclists carry so much of a burden as it is, that I am hoping you can channel your good intentions into a different sort of bill.** I and the rest of the cycling community are more than willing to offer our ideas.

Thank you,

Penny Troutner

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