



**Maryland Department of Transportation  
Office of the Secretary  
7201 Corporate Center Drive  
Hanover MD 21076**

**Committee: ENV**

**Date: 2/12/13**

**Bill #: HB 339**

**Position: SUPPORT**

**Title: Vehicle Laws - Bicycles - Required Use of Protective Headgear**

**Explanation:** House Bill 339 would expand the requirement to wear a helmet to all bicycle riders regardless of age.

**Comment:** The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports HB 339. MDOT is committed to promoting safety. While mandatory helmet measures raise a number of important issues, with advocates and cyclists truly concerned about safety often reaching different conclusions, overall MDOT believes that the safest course is to require helmets for all bicycle riders as advanced by HB 339.

Current law only requires bicycle riders up to the age of 16 to wear a helmet. This proposal would expand that requirement to all bicycle riders, regardless of age. Head injuries are the most serious type of injury and the most common cause of death for bicyclists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that 70% of fatal bike crashes involve head injuries; however, only about 20 to 25% of bicycle riders actually wear helmets. NHTSA further reports that bicycle helmets are 85 to 88% effective in mitigating head injuries.

The Bike Helmet Safety Institute reports that 45 to 88% of cyclists' brain injuries could be prevented by helmet use, saving an estimated \$81 million annually in injury-related direct costs. NHTSA provides that every \$1 spent on a bicycle helmet saves society \$30 in indirect medical costs. A 2001 analysis of 18 studies on bicycle helmet effectiveness concluded that helmets reduce the risk of death as well as head, brain, and facial injury in accidents involving bicycle operators. The report further concluded that, overall, helmets decrease the risk of head and brain injury by 70 to 88% and facial injury to the upper and mid face by 65%. Countless research studies have thus demonstrated that helmets are the most effective means of preventing head and brain injury for bicycle operators.

MDOT has heard and understands the counter arguments made by other well intentioned, safety minded advocates within the cycling community. Counter arguments often center around potentially limiting bicycle ridership, which could diminish the effect of 'safety in numbers'. In addition, MDOT also has to consider a potential negative impact on bikesharing and other businesses that depend on bicycling, and the Maryland 20-Year Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Master Plan, which calls for measures that would increase bicycling.

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These are very real concerns and factors to be considered, and work to address them will need to be done. However, in weighing them, the potential increased safety benefits brought on by universal helmet use resonated even more strongly.

For that reason, MDOT supports HB 339 and respectfully requests that the Committee grant the bill a favorable report.