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**It is not too late to avoid a mistake: Keep Michigan's all-rider motorcycle helmet law**

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Scottville, MI - SMARTER (Skilled Motorcyclist Association–Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc., at [www.smarter-usa.org](http://www.smarter-usa.org)) president, Dan Petterson, stated in a May 26 news release that it is not too late for Michigan to avoid the mistakes other states have made regarding motorcyclist safety.

“Pennsylvania has learned the hard way. They have unnecessarily killed and injured citizens who ride motorcycles and have forced the general population to pay for the irresponsible decisions of a few who chose to ride helmetless. There is no need for Michigan to repeat the Pennsylvania experiment,” Petterson said. “Now Pennsylvania needs to try to correct a poor decision and restore a vital component of their comprehensive motorcyclist safety program. We don’t need to learn the hard way.”

Pennsylvania state Rep. Dan Frankel has introduced legislation to restore Pennsylvania’s all-rider motorcycle helmet law, along with two new bills as “stop-gap” measures.

As changed in 2003, Pennsylvania law allows motorcycle riders 21 years of age or older to go helmetless if they have been licensed to operate a motorcycle for at least two years or have completed a motorcycle safety course approved by the state Department of Transportation or the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. This is the same requirement being proposed in Michigan by SB 291 and HB 4608.

One of the “stop-gap” bills is designed to reduce the costs to the public for medical expenses incurred by helmetless riders who suffer injuries in a crash by requiring additional health and long-term care insurance for motorcycle riders who choose not to wear a helmet. The second bill is aimed to provide a means for law enforcement to identify young riders who are required to wear a helmet, by creating a special license plate for riders 20 years of age or younger.

“The increase in deaths and injuries on our roads and the shattered lives of victims and their families ought to be enough to admit the 2003 repeal was a mistake, and we should fix it,” Frankel said at a May 23 news conference.

Pennsylvania motorcyclists suffered large increases in head-injury deaths and hospitalizations in the two years following the repeal of its motorcycle helmet law, according to a University of Pittsburgh study that was published in the August 2008 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*. Even after accounting for increases in motorcycle registrations that occurred during this period, study authors noted a 32 percent increase in head-injury deaths and a 42 percent increase in head-injury-related hospitalizations, raising concerns about motorcyclists’ safety and the impact of this trend on health care costs. The authors also looked at data from head-injury and

non-head-injury deaths to determine specifically how many deaths were caused by not wearing helmets. They found the registration-adjusted head-injury death rate increased, whereas the non-head-injury death rate did not change.

([http://www.neurosurgery.pitt.edu/news/2008/head\\_injuries.html](http://www.neurosurgery.pitt.edu/news/2008/head_injuries.html) )

“Many studies have shown that motorcycle helmets save lives, helmet laws save lives, and helmet law repeals lead to increased head injuries and deaths. What we found in Pennsylvania was no exception,” said Dr. Kristen Mertz of the University of Pittsburgh, a co-author of the 2008 study.

Frankel said, “Studies show that we can save three times as many lives annually by returning to a universal helmet law. People say they want a choice, but our intent was that youth would comply, and that people would be responsible. If people want to ride, then they need to prepare as if they might have an accident. Most importantly, we’re sending the wrong message to our youth. They’re not complying.”

Petterson points to Florida as another example of the ineffectiveness of partial laws like the ones proposed for Michigan. “In Florida, among riders under the age of 21, deaths of unhelmeted riders increased by 188 percent, even though the helmet law still applied to them,” he said, “and the cost of treating head injuries from motorcycle crashes more than doubled.” He further noted the extensive research cited in “How to save lives and save money,” a recently released document from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that conclusively shows helmet laws do save both lives and money. “Michigan should be wise enough not to repeat the mistakes of other states. Pennsylvania now knows they made a huge mistake by repealing their all-rider helmet law, and Michigan is preparing to make the same mistake. It is not yet too late to save lives and save money,” Petterson said.

Frankel also stated: “While preventing tragedies is the most important reason to restore the helmet law, there are several other reasons to fix this mistake, including the cost to taxpayers and insurance ratepayers of preventable deaths and head injuries, as well as the likely increase in motorcycle use due to higher gas prices.

“Research by the University of Pittsburgh estimates that just the additional head injuries suffered since the repeal of the mandatory helmet law cost the Commonwealth approximately \$18 million in hospital charges and \$55 million in long-term care annually. Despite the known hazards, motorcycle riders are only required to carry the state minimum liability insurance coverage – a luxury we can no longer afford when the state budget is likely to include hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to education and health care that will cost jobs.

“Instead of cutting services to vulnerable Pennsylvanians, here is an easy way to save money.”

“The same is true for Michigan,” Petterson pointed out. “Analysis by the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning estimates that Michigan will see an annual increase of at least 30 fatalities, 127 incapacitating injuries and \$129 million in economic costs. That’s every year. We shouldn’t have to conduct our own human experiment to know that repeal of our current lifesaving and dollar-saving helmet law would be a huge mistake.”