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Future Looks Scary for Michigan Motorcyclist Safety

Scottville, MI – Repeal of Michigan’s decades-old mandatory motorcycle helmet law advanced a big step procedurally Oct. 26, when bills referred to the House Committee on Transportation were reported to the full House. “This is scary, not just for motorcyclists but for all Michigan citizens,” said Dan Petterson, president of the Skilled Motorcyclist Association—Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc. (SMARTER), adding that “the future of our state’s comprehensive motorcyclist safety efforts looks in doubt. Repealing our current all-rider helmet law is in direct conflict with every bit of research that is available to us regarding how to save lives, reduce the risk of injury and save the costs associated with the treatment of those who suffer needless injury as a result of choosing to ride without a helmet.”

According to Petterson, the move is also in direct conflict with state-agency recommendations, including those made by the Michigan Office of Highway Safety and Planning following a 2005 Motorcycle Safety Program assessment conducted by a team of national experts, the Secretary of State Motorcycle Safety Advisory Committee after discussions in 2006 and 2007, and the Governor’s Traffic Safety Advisory Commission (GTSAC) in its longstanding Michigan Motorcycle Safety Action Plan.

“Additionally, our nation’s preeminent medical authority, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, concluded in a document released earlier this year that the single most effective way for states to save lives and save money is a universal helmet law, and here we are staged to take a big step backward,” Petterson said.

SMARTER works closely with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and other organizations in an effort to ensure legislators have current, accurate information. Representatives from the motorcyclist safety advocate association attended the meeting of the House Committee on Transportation last Wednesday and presented a statement from the vice chairman of the NTSB. Petterson was dismayed that “the chairman announced no further testimony would be taken, so this important information from NTSB was not even referenced, nor were committee members given time to review it before taking action.

“It is more than merely ironic that the Motorcycle Action Team (the subcommittee of the GTSAC responsible for motorcyclist safety of which Petterson is a member) held its fall meeting the day after the transportation committee made this disappointing decision. We learned that very preliminary data show the number of motorcyclist deaths so far this year is down. That could be because some of the new efforts of OHSP and DOS have been effective; however, we also know that all predictions are that repeal of our current law will result in an immediate increase in motorcyclist deaths.”