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To The Editor:

HELMET REPEAL IS A STEP IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

It is with great disappointment that I learned last week of the decision of the Michigan Association of Police Organizations (MAPO) to support HB 4749, a bill that would repeal Michigan's current motorcycle helmet law and replace it with one that would allow motorcycle operator's to purchase a helmet exemption permit for \$100 per year.

Based on analysis conducted by our office, if Michigan's mandatory motorcycle helmet law were to be repealed, the state should expect to see an annual increase of at least 30 fatalities, 127 incapacitating injuries, and \$129 million in economic costs. Helmet repeals in other states have generated significant increases in fatalities, injuries, and economic costs. As an example, following helmet repeals, fatalities increased 21 percent in Arkansas, 31 percent in Texas, over 50 percent in Kentucky and 100 percent in Louisiana. In Louisiana, the helmet law was reinstated in 2004.

While public debate over whether there should be a legal requirement to wear a helmet is understandable, debate over the safety benefits of helmets is not. Every reputable research organization in the world supports the use of helmets as a way to reduce injury, death and economic costs resulting from brain trauma. The facts are not only clear, but undeniable. What is not clear is how the MAPO arrived at the position that HB 4749 is a modernization of Michigan's current helmet law. With revenue generated by HB 4749 going to benefit law enforcement programs, it creates the possible perception that MAPO's support is linked to the financial benefits of the bill, rather than a true concern about traffic safety.

Michigan has always been seen as a leader with regard to traffic safety. Laws mandating the use of helmets and safety belts are there for good reason and Michigan's track record in reducing traffic fatalities and injuries is envied by many other states. Repealing traffic safety requirements in exchange for funding to public safety, real or perceived, is not only a step backwards, but it sends the wrong message to the public. The end result will be a short-term gain in revenue for a long-term loss in lives, serious and disabling injuries, and millions in economic costs to the citizens of Michigan.

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