Oppose Repeal of Motorcycle Helmet Laws

Rural Health Association of Tennessee opposes any weakening of the motorcycle helmet laws and offer these points in support of our position:

- 80% of motorcycle riders involved in crashes are either injured or killed. (NCSL Transportation Review, 2012)

- A national study researched six years of information in the National Trauma Data Bank on motorcycle crashes. It concluded that unhelmeted motorcycle crash patients suffer more severe brain injuries, consume more resources, and have the worst insurance payor mix. Society bears a large financial burden for these uninsured unhelmeted patients. There is a survival advantage for helmeted patients. (Annals of Surgery, 2009)

- In the event of a crash, unhelmeted motorcyclists are three times more likely than helmeted riders to suffer traumatic brain injuries.

- A 1996 NHTSA study showed average inpatient hospital charges for unhelmeted motorcyclists in crashes were 8 percent higher than for helmeted riders ($15,578 compared with $14,377).

- Not only do helmets reduce mortality by 30%, but resource utilization as measured by hospital and ICU days was also decreased. The average daily cost of an ICU bed is $3,500.

- Studies indicate that the risk of brain injury in hospitalized motorcyclists is nearly twice that for unhelmeted motorcyclists and that unhelmeted drivers had acute care costs three times ($30,365) that of helmeted drivers.

- An estimate of medical and non-medical (e.g., home modifications, vocational rehabilitation, health insurance) per Traumatic Brain Injury survivor averages $151,587.

- Kentucky repealed its universal helmet law in 1998, followed by Louisiana in 1999. These actions resulted in lower helmet use, and quickly increased motorcyclist deaths in these states by 50 percent and 100 percent, respectively. (Louisiana reinstated its motorcycle helmet law in 2004.)

- When a plaintiff challenged the state law requiring helmets, a federal court in Massachusetts ruled that, “From the moment of injury, society picks the person up off the highway, delivers him to a municipal hospital and municipal doctors; provides him with unemployment compensation if, after recovery, he cannot replace his lost job; and, if the injury causes permanent disability, may assume responsibility for his and his family’s subsistence. We do not understand a state of mind that permits plaintiff to think that only he himself is concerned.”

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