The Connecticut hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of SB 721, An Act Requiring The Use Of Helmets By Motorcycle Operators And Passengers.

SB 721 requires all operators of and passengers on motorcycles to wear protective headgear. An average of 34 motorcyclists are killed on Connecticut’s roadways every year. Another 1,557 on average are injured. Motorcycle use has been reported to be the strongest predictor of a subsequent fatal accident in men, who represent 93% of those killed or injured on motorcycles in Connecticut. A direct comparison of motorcycle mortality between Connecticut and New York, which has a mandatory helmet law, showed that helmet use was higher in New York than in Connecticut (91% vs. 18%). Mortality was higher in Connecticut than in New York (15% vs. 6%).

The risks associated with motorcycle use can be mitigated by wearing a helmet, as demonstrated by the experience of states that have either passed or repealed motorcycle helmet laws. On July 1, 1997, Arkansas became the first state in 14 years to repeal its adult helmet law. The result was that nonhelmeted deaths at the scene of a crash significantly increased from 19 of 48 (39.6%) (1995-1996) to 40 of 53 (75.5%) (1998-1999). Before repeal, 25% of nonfatal crash admissions were nonhelmeted (18 of 73). This significantly increased to 54% (52 of 96) after repeal. Failure to wear a helmet has been shown to significantly increase the incidence and severity of head injuries among motorcyclists.

Maryland enacted an all-rider motorcycle helmet law on October 1, 1992. In Maryland, the motorcyclist fatality rate dropped from 10.3 per 10,000 registered motorcycles prelaw to 4.5 postlaw despite almost identical numbers of registered motorcycles. Motorcyclists wearing helmets had a lower risk of traumatic brain injury than those not wearing helmets.

In addition to the personal costs related to increased injury severity among nonhelmeted motorcyclists, there is an additional financial burden on hospitals as well. In one study, helmet use decreased mean cost of hospitalization by more than $6,000 per patient. It also has been reported that injured motorcyclists who were not wearing helmets had an increased use of hospital resources with their helmeted counterparts.
As caregivers of those involved in motorcycles accidents, hospitals know all too well the large number of fatalities and injuries of operators and passengers who do not wear protective headgear. Emergency department staff struggle everyday to save the lives of patients injured in motorcycle accidents, and hospitals see this bill as a significant step toward reducing the number of injuries and deaths by operators and passengers of motorcycles who do not wear protective headgear.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.

The following are the data sources and references for CHA’s testimony:

Data Sources

References