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**Ohio House of Representatives**

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**Before the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee**

**House Bill 97 – Ohio Child Bicycle Safety Act**

**Sponsor Testimony by Representative Michael J. Skindell**

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill97, which is called Ohio’s Child Bicycle Helmet Safety Act. I have introduced this piece of legislation in every General Assembly, dating back to the 128th.

At this time, there is no statewide requirement for minors to wear helmets while riding bicycles. This creates serious health and safety risks to our kids. The day a parent buys their child his or her first bike, the day a parent removes the training wheels and the day a child heads to their friend’s house without asking for a ride; these are milestones in the lives of both a child and a parent. So much more than a toy, a bicycle represents independence for our children.

According to the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2015, more than 206,000 children across the United States visited the emergency room for bicycle-related injuries. Nearly half of these children suffer from traumatic brain injuries. The National Safe Kids campaign estimates that properly-fitted bike helmets could prevent 88% of these injuries.

Unfortunately, bicycles are much more than a toy. Bicycles are associated with more childhood injuries than any consumer product except the automobile. Here are some statistics:

* In 2015, 818 bicyclists died on US roadways, an increase of 12.2% and the highest number since 1995;
* Approximately 10,700 children are hospitalized annually for a bicycle-related injury in the U.S. with an average length of stay of three days in the hospital;
* One-third of children hospitalized for a bicycle-related injury are diagnosed with traumatic brain injury;
* Bicyclist deaths represented 2.3% of all traffic fatalities in 2013;
* 45,000 bicyclists were injured in traffic in 2015[[1]](#footnote-1);

It is because of these statistics that cities and states nationwide have enacted bicycle-helmet laws. These laws are designed to significantly increase the number of children wearing helmets and reduce the number of head injuries and deaths among children.

As of 2016, 22 states, the District of Columbia, and at least 201 localities have enacted age-specific bicycle-helmet laws[[2]](#footnote-2). Most of these laws cover bicyclists under 16. Ohio communities which have enacted bicycle-helmet laws include:

Akron Under 16 2001

Beachwood Under 16 1990

Bexley Under 16 2010

Blue Ash Under 16 2003

Brecksville Under 18 1998

Brooklyn Under 14 2001

Centerville Under 16 1999

Cincinnati Under 16 2004

Columbus Under 18 2009

Dayton Under 13 2004

East Cleveland Under 18 2004

Enon Under 16 2004

Euclid Under 14 2001

Glendale Under 19 2000

Kettering Under 16 2004

Lakewood Under 18 1997

Madeira Under 17 2002

Marietta Under 16 2004

Orange Village Ages 6 to 15 1992

Pepper Pike Under 18 2000

Shaker Heights All ages over 5 1997

(including passengers)

South Euclid Under 14 2000

Strongsville Under 12 1993

Waynesville Under 17 2000[[3]](#footnote-3)

Ohio’s Child Bicycle Helmet Safety Act, as proposed in House Bill 97, is intended to encourage children to wear helmets. Children under the age of 18 not wearing a helmet will receive a citation and could receive a $25 fine. The parent or guardian of the child is responsible for the payment of the fine. A court may waive the fine if it is demonstrated that a helmet has been purchased. The offense is to be a strict-liability one. Fines collected under this law shall be deposited in the Bicycle Safety Fund. Money in the fund must be used to assist low-income families in the purchase of helmets.

A helmet is the single most effective safety device for reducing the severity of head injuries and the likelihood of death following a bicycle crash. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has also demonstrated that helmet laws have resulted in an 18.4% increase in the use of helmets by children, even when the laws are not rigorously enforced. The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that states without helmet laws average 15% helmet use among the general public.

The economic impact of not wearing a helmet is enormous. Moreover, a study conducted by researchers at the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, published in October 2007, estimated that bicycle-related injuries among children and adolescents resulted in nearly $200 million in hospital in-patient charges annually.

I can personally attest to the fact that helmets do save lives. As you may be aware, in August 2007, while riding my bicycle, I struck an automobile that suddenly turned left in front of me. Upon impact, my head struck the roof of the car, and when I flew over the car, I struck the pavement of the road, head first. If I had not been wearing a helmet, my injuries certainly would have been catastrophic, if not fatal.

My appeal to this committee is simple: Let’s pass the Child Bicycle Helmet Safety Act for all Ohio’s children. And, in the meantime, if you ride a bike, wear a helmet. Our kids need to see that this is not a punishment just because they are under 18. It’s a “common-sense” thing to do. A $10 or $35 helmet can be the difference between life and death.

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to provide sponsor testimony on HB 97. I would be happy to answer any questions.

1. Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute. January 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute. January 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)