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A Vicious Cycle: Implementing Universal Helmet Laws for Bikers

As I walked into my neighbor's graduation party, I had no idea it would be the last time I saw him. I recall the pretty blue and white decorations, the juicy crunch of the fresh grapes, and the cheerful music playing in the background. Just weeks later, the excitement had vanished. My neighbor was riding his motorcycle one afternoon, carefully as always. A lawn truck started to turn without properly checking the street for traffic. My neighbor had nowhere to turn and no time to stop. He ended up crashing into the truck and flying off of his motorcycle. Later that night, he died from internal injuries and brain trauma. He was wearing a helmet. Motorcycle accidents can be fatal whether the rider is wearing a helmet or not. It is critical that state governments require the use of helmets for all bikers. We need to save as many lives as possible.

We have laws for a reason. Not everyone can make good decisions for themselves; sometimes we need a reminder to do what is in our best interest. Experience gives some people confidence, but even the most experienced driver can get in an accident. Not everyone on the road is experienced. Some state governments decided to modify or revoke helmet laws because of the pressure from groups lobbying for motorcyclist rights (Clemmitt). These governments weren't trying to take away their rights. They were trying to save as many lives as they can. The most effective way to achieve this is instating stricter helmet laws. Tax money and health care costs and premiums are affected by motorcycle accidents ("Safety"). The biker is not the only

one to suffer from the consequences of their accident. Regulating their actions is imperative to save money and to save lives.

Many states have implemented partial helmet laws and require a safety course as an alternative to wearing a helmet. Yet, there is no evidence to support that safety training prevents motorcycle accidents (Clemmitt). It is a helpful resource for bikers, but it is not a legitimate substitute for stricter helmet laws. It is difficult to stop short or swerve out of the way in a motorcycle. Other drivers' actions are unpredictable; even the most experienced motorcyclist cannot always prevent an accident because of the way the motorcycle functions.

Donald Good, a biker of fifteen years, commented that he “only wear[s] helmets in the states that require them” (“Riding”). Universal helmet laws would be effective because most bikers will abide by the laws. Three states have no helmet laws: Iowa, Illinois, and New Hampshire (“Do Motorcyclists”). Seventy-nine percent of motorcyclists were not wearing a helmet in fatal crashes in these states (Helmet). Twenty-eight states have partial helmet laws with restrictions on age, insurance policies, safety training, and driving experience (“Do Motorcyclists”). Sixty-four percent of those who died in motorcycles accidents in these states were not wearing helmets (“Helmet”). Nineteen states have universal helmet laws (“Do Motorcyclists”). Only twelve percent of people in these states were not wearing helmets in a deadly crash. (“Helmet”). The stricter the laws, the more likely people are to follow them. Following the helmet laws is what saves the most lives.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania abandoned its universal helmet law in 2003. Since then, motorcycle accidents have occurred thirty-five percent more frequently along with more frequent head injury (“Safety”). Eliminating the universal helmet law was the wrong decision. We need to reinstate it in order to protect PA bikers. In Pennsylvania, those who weren't wearing a

helmet have accounted for fifty-two percent of people who died in motorcycles accidents ("Riding"). By wearing a helmet, that fifty-two percent of people would have had a much better chance of surviving the accident they were in.

By wearing a helmet, a biker is thirty-seven percent less likely to die in an accident and 3 times less likely to be subject to brain trauma ("Motorcycles"). Since there are no seatbelts or airbags in motorcycles, the only safety option is helmets. Just in the year 2013, one thousand six hundred thirty people's lives were saved by using a helmet. However, the "NHTSA estimates that [helmets] could have saved the lives of seven hundred fifteen more," bikers ("Riding"). Helmets are the most effective way to save lives in motorcycle accidents. With universal helmet laws, many more lives could have been saved.

Governors Highway Safety Association chairman and director of Tennessee Office of Highway Safety Kendell Poole states that "By far, helmets are the single most effective way to prevent serious injury and death in the event of a motorcycle crash" (Halsey). We should create universal helmet laws in all states to put the available safety equipment to good use. Fourteen percent of "traffic-related deaths" result from motorcycles. This is surprising because "motorcycles comprise only three percent of all vehicles on the road," ("Riding"). Motorcycles are much more dangerous than cars. We need to make their only available safety feature, helmets, mandatory for all riders.

Motorcycle helmets are the most effective way to prevent brain trauma and save lives in motorcycle accidents. Although some bikers believe it should be their choice to wear them, they aren't aware that the consequences of their actions affect more than just themselves.

Government and tax money goes into treating people after accidents. Risking their life by not

wearing a helmet is selfish and dangerous. Laws serve as a way to remind people to do what is right for themselves and for others. Motorcycle helmet laws should be universal in all states.

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