



**ride SMARTER**  
**STAY SAFER**  
WITH ALL THE GEAR ALL THE TIME

**STATEMENT OF  
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Skilled Motorcyclist Association—Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc.**

**On the Release of the  
2014 Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws  
National Press Club, Washington, D.C.  
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Good morning. I am Dan Petterson, founder and president of SMARTER, a nonprofit motorcyclist association that emphasizes the importance of research as a foundation for the implementation of effective motorcyclist-safety strategies. I have been riding motorcycles since 1963, and since 1986 I have been involved in developing rider-education programs as well as in training rider coaches. I always wear a helmet along with other protective gear.

I am a strong supporter of all-rider motorcycle helmet laws and strongly opposed the repeal of Michigan's all-rider helmet law in 2012. Motorcycle helmets and all-rider helmet laws save lives and reduce injuries. It is sad that this issue is even debated. It is irrefutable that helmets protect the head and brain, that wearing a helmet reduces deaths and injuries, and that when an all-rider law is in effect, almost every rider wears a helmet. Unfortunately, since Michigan's Governor Snyder signed the repeal law, helmet use in Michigan decreased and riders unnecessarily were injured or died because of their choice not to wear a helmet. This is not a surprising outcome but is a tragic and costly outcome.

Wearing a helmet is not a freedom-of-choice issue; it is a safety issue. In 2012, nearly 5,000 motorcyclists were killed and 93,000 were injured nationwide. This is a 7 percent increase in fatalities from the preceding year. Motorcyclists represented 14 percent of the total traffic fatalities in 2012, yet accounted for only 3 percent of all registered vehicles in the United States.

Governments have a positive role in ensuring citizen safety. To enjoy the privilege of driving a car, operating a jet ski or riding a motorcycle, one must comply with certain nonintrusive, lifesaving requirements—buckle up, put on a life vest or wear a helmet. With the growing death toll of motorcycle riders, you might think that elected officials would be taking swift action to remedy this problem; however, just the opposite is happening.

During the early years of my riding career, nearly every state had an all-rider motorcycle helmet law. Today, only 19 states and the District of Columbia require all motorcyclists to wear helmets, and last year more than half of these state legislatures, 11, considered 19 bills repealing these laws in Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington. The governors of these states must put a halt to any further attacks on these statutes. On the other hand, I commend the sponsors of all-rider helmet laws in Iowa, Maine and Rhode Island, and urge other legislators to follow their lead.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), a law requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets is the only strategy proven to be effective in reducing fatalities. In fact, helmets saved the lives of almost 1,700 motorcyclists in 2012, and 781 more riders could have been saved had they worn helmets. Further, for every 100 motorcycle riders killed in crashes while not wearing a helmet, 37 of them could have been saved if they were helmeted.

Every reputable safety research organization in the world supports the use of helmets. Groups that oppose all-rider helmet laws and fight for their repeal represent a very small percentage of Americans who ride motorcycles. While some of these organizations claim to represent and speak for all riders, they certainly do not represent or speak for all of us.

In states without an all-rider helmet law, helmet use is lower, deaths are higher, and taxpayers are forced to pay for the increased health care costs resulting from crashes involving unhelmeted riders. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, in 2012, there were ten times as many unhelmeted fatalities in states without all-rider laws as in states with such laws. In states without all-rider laws, 65 percent of motorcyclists killed in 2011 were not wearing helmets, as compared to 9 percent in states with such laws.

Organizations opposed to all-rider helmet laws claim that rider-training and motorist-awareness programs are substitutes for wearing a helmet. They are wrong—dead wrong. I am a supporter of rider training and awareness programs, but motorcyclists still crash; and wearing quality gear, including a helmet, is the only protection a rider has in the event of a crash. The all-rider helmet law repeal in Michigan has just added my state to the list of states participating in what amounts to a vast experiment affirming the effectiveness of all-rider helmet laws in reducing motorcyclist deaths and injuries, and affirming increasing medical payments for injured riders when all-rider helmet laws are repealed.

I urge governors and state legislative leaders to pay attention to their ratings in this Roadmap Report and to the overwhelming evidence that all-rider helmet laws save lives. The bottom line is, helmets save lives and prevent serious injuries. When all-rider helmet laws are in effect, more riders wear helmets. I urge lawmakers in the 31 states without all-rider laws to take action today to get these essential lifesaving laws on the books. Legislative leaders need to step up and just say NO to the attacks on existing all-rider helmet laws. It's time Michigan lawmakers realize that it was a deadly mistake to repeal our lifesaving law, and it's time to restore the law this year, in light of the deaths, injuries and costs that have occurred since its repeal.