

Republican Plan To Ban DC Helmet Laws First Step Toward Rolling Back Helmet Laws Across The Country, Co-Sponsor Claims

By Collin Woodard, August 13, 2026

Everything's more expensive than it was, the president's wasting billions fighting a losing war with Iran, we're being tracked everywhere we go, and giant corporations keep building dirty, loud data centers anywhere they can buy the land, but don't you worry. Wisconsin Representative Derrick Van Orden and Montana Senator Tim Sheehy are focused on addressing the biggest problem currently facing this country: stopping Washington, D.C. residents from requiring helmets on motorcycles. And according to the Washington Post, that's just the first part of their plan to eliminate helmet laws.

Currently, 17 states have universal helmet laws similar to D.C.'s, while 47 states have some kind of helmet laws on the books. But Sheehy and Van Orden aren't trying to get D.C. residents to change their own law. Instead, they're trying to use the force of the federal government to overturn a law that Washington, D.C. passed decades ago. Neither lawmaker represents the people who live in the city, and D.C. residents don't seem to be asking for any changes to their helmet laws, but that doesn't matter to these two.

Van Orden calls his proposed legislation the "Ride in Freedom Act," and as spokesperson Grace Kim told the Washington Post, he doesn't plan to stop at simply overturning D.C.'s universal helmet law, saying, "D.C. is an important place to start. If Congress can change the policy here, it opens the door to having a larger conversation about the federal government's role in helmet mandates across the country."

Perfect timing: Link to YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fq-Y5loQB00>

Safety experts will tell you, of course, that repealing helmet laws is a terrible idea. Eric Teoh, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's head of statistical services, told WaPo that a universal helmet law is "one of the most effective, common-sense rules of the road for improving motorcycle safety," and said, "Weakening that will result in people dying."

Meanwhile, council member Charles Allen, who chairs the city's transportation committee released a statement where he called the bill "an unserious and unsafe proposal." Allen added:

“A member of Congress from Wisconsin has nothing they can do to make life a little more affordable or a little bit better for their own constituents, so they spend their time writing helmet laws for people riding motorcycles in DC? I really think they can be better than this.”

The Harley-riding Wisconsin representative's timing also couldn't be better. The bills he and Sen. Sheehy introduced come at a time when traffic fatalities are up in D.C. According to WaPo, city data shows that road deaths "more than doubled during the first half of this year compared with the same period last year. 2026 has also proven to be a deadlier year for motorcycle crashes, with six people dying in D.C. so far this year, up from two in all of 2025.

It's also a city where motorcycle deaths are relatively rare, at least given its size. Since 2014, D.C.'s seen 67 fatal motorcycle crashes, putting the city on track to potentially double its annual motorcycle deaths this year. Other states have seen similar increases in motorcycle deaths, as well, including Colorado, where 2026's deaths are higher than they've been in almost a decade.

Feel the wind on what's left of your shattered skull:

Link to RevZilla, Common Thread video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpBOKgmG2zs>

Riding motorcycles has become more dangerous across the country, too. In 2024, the U.S. saw 6,228 deaths in motorcycle crashes, which is roughly triple the number of motorcycle deaths recorded in 1997. We already know states without universal helmet laws see more fatal motorcycle crashes than states that have them, and we've already seen what happens when states repeal helmet laws - motorcycle deaths increase. If Sheehy and Van Orden successfully ban D.C. from enforcing its helmet law, more people are going to die. That's just the way reality works.

According to Kim, the Wisconsin representative's spokesperson, those deaths don't matter, since "a motorcycle is a symbol of freedom," and helmet laws are just the Big Bad Government limiting people's freedom. So, the only solution is to use the power of the federal government to eliminate safety laws, consequences be damned.

The consequences of repealing helmet laws go beyond an increase in fatal motorcycle crashes. Even if you think people should have the freedom to take their own risks, study after study shows that repealing helmet laws increases medical treatment costs. In turn, those higher

hospitalization rates cost states tens of millions of dollars every year since many riders are uninsured or underinsured. As one GAO report found, every motorcycle death costs society about \$480,000. With inflation, that would be about \$1.25 million.

Beyond the cost to taxpayers, repealing helmet laws hurts drivers, as well. Any crash is probably going to cause a temporary traffic jam and increase delays, but fatal crashes take far longer to investigate and clean up. Just last month, a fatal motorcycle crash in Washington state closed four lanes of traffic and backed traffic up for miles. Throw in the anguish of losing a loved one or living with the knowledge you killed someone with your car, and it's hard to find any measurable benefits to repealing helmet laws. As the IIHS's Teoh told the Post, "You need to also weigh the cost of what that means. This is a very terrible cost for the freedom to ride with the wind in your hair."