

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5334

AS PASSED SENATE, MARCH 17, 1993

Brief Description: Requiring bicycle helmets.

SPONSORS: Senators West and Moyer

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Talmadge, Chairman; Deccio, Franklin, Fraser, Hargrove, McAuliffe, McDonald, Moyer, Niemi, Prentice, and Sheldon.

Staff: Scott Plack (786-7409)

Hearing Dates: February 1, 1993; February 5, 1993

BACKGROUND:

Each year in the United States nearly 600,000 people visit a hospital emergency room because of injuries sustained from riding a bicycle. More than 1,300 of these people die. In Washington State, more than 500 people are injured or killed every year from bicycle-related injuries. The vast majority of bicycle-related injuries are head injuries. A recent study conducted in Seattle has indicated that the use of bicycle helmets could reduce head injuries by 85 percent.

Research shows that during the period between 1989 and 1990 bicycle injuries in Washington State cost \$6 million in hospital fees alone. The treatment and rehabilitation costs of bicycle-related head injuries average \$11,306 per injury. Nearly 16 percent of hospitalizations for bicycle-related injuries are paid through public assistance programs such as Medicaid.

Numerous states have enacted mandatory helmet use legislation for children including: California, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York. In addition, the King County Board of Health recently enacted an ordinance requiring helmet use by bicycle riders of all ages. The ordinance applies to all areas of the county except the city of Seattle and takes effect on March 4, 1993.

SUMMARY:

Existing private and public education programs are recognized as effective in encouraging people to use bicycle helmets. Effective July, 1994 it will be unlawful for any person to ride a bicycle without an approved bicycle helmet. It will also be unlawful for any person to transport another person on

a bicycle, or in a trailer towed by a bicycle, without a helmet. Guardians of children under the age of 16 years must take reasonable steps to prevent the child from riding the bicycle without a helmet. Any person renting a bicycle must be reasonably satisfied that the person riding the bicycle will wear an approved helmet.

Violation of the act is a traffic offense but will not be reported on the person's driving record. In order to facilitate education about the act, from January 1, 1994 to January 1, 1995, a person found violating provisions of the act will not be served with a traffic infraction but may be subject to a written warning. After January 1, 1995 a traffic infraction may be issued. First offenders of the act may have the traffic infraction dismissed without costs if he or she appears before the court with evidence that he or she has obtained an approved helmet.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

TESTIMONY FOR:

The legislation will reduce the number of injuries and deaths from head injuries sustained while riding a bicycle. A DOH study estimates that a 50 percent compliance with the bill would result in a reduction of 840 head injuries and at least \$9.5 million in reduced medical costs. The education and delayed enforcement will help educate the public to use helmets.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Jean Leonard, State Farm Insurance, Washington Insurers (pro); John Gullickson, SAFECO (pro); Susan Dietrich, Governor's Steering Committee, EMS/Trauma (pro); John Zingheim (pro); David Pomeroy, WSMA (pro); Phil Miller, King County Department of Public Works (pro); Susie Tracy, Washington Ambulance Association (pro); David Obermiller, City of Des Moines Police (pro); Steve Call, King County Emergency Medical Services (pro); Ilene Kasten, Department of Health (pro); Donnie Smith (pro); Steve Lind, WTSC; Tim Erickson, State Patrol (pro); Joe Ganem, Bike Federation/WC (pro); Mike Dolan, Bicycle Federation of Washington (pro); Mike Dornfeld, Washington State Department of Transportation (pro)