

Senate Bill 113: The Use of Bicycle Helmets for Minors and Providing of a
Penalty

Written Testimony for the Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
September 12, 2001

Suzanne Gorman Sublette
for the
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families provisionally supports Senate Bill 113. It is our belief that the physical safety of all children be foremost represented in our state laws.

Undoubtedly, bicycle safety is an important issue. According to the Johns Hopkins Injury Prevention Center, bicycle-related crashes kill 900 people every year and injure approximately 567,000 others to a degree where emergency room treatment is necessary. An additional 20,000 individuals are hospitalized due to bicycle-related injuries each year.

Even more alarming facts come from the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute. Bicyclist injury rates are highest for children aged 5 to 15 years. Considering that motor vehicles are involved in 91 percent of bicyclist deaths and considering that approximately 96 percent of cyclists killed in 1996 were not wearing helmets, mandated use of helmets is a crucial protective factor. Simply wearing a bicycle helmet reduces the risk of head injury by 85 percent.

When injuries do occur, the head is hit in 38 percent of the accidents. This figure increases to 55 percent for those between the ages of 5 and 10 years old (BHSI, 2001).

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is currently engaged in ongoing research regarding early childhood brain development. Given the high percentage rate of head injury among children involved in bicycle

accidents, the Council is concerned with addressing means of avoiding serious developmental impediments to normal cognitive functioning. 80 percent of all neurons (brain cells) are found in the cortex as well as 75 percent of all synaptic brain connections. Since the cortex of the brain regulates activities such as language, mathematical ability, abstract thought, decision-making, and judgment, among other things, any and all safeguard measures should be taken to ensure healthy cognitive development. We believe that the crux of Senate Bill 113 does provide one such safeguard.

The Council would also like to stress the fact that Wisconsin, as a state, lags behind other states in this initiative. At this point in time, 20 states have enacted laws similar or nearly identical to Bill 113. At least 10 additional states have also enacted county or local laws on this issue as well (BHSL, 2001).

The Council does, however, recognize potential problems with Senate Bill 113 as it is now written. Specifically, we are concerned about how the passage of the Bill, in current form, would affect low-income families and children. We note that the cost of purchasing a bicycle helmet ranges from approximately \$15 to \$50. This is a cost that low-income families simply cannot afford, especially if there are multiple children in one household.

There are few programs in Wisconsin that sponsor "low to no cost" bicycle helmets for low-income children and families. A list of possible resources for providing more information on "low to no-cost" bicycle helmets for economically challenged children and families can be found at the end of this testimony.

In conclusion, although the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families strongly supports measures to ensure child safety (as embodied in Bill 113), the Council is hesitant to endorse aspects of the Bill that have the potential to marginalize low-income children and their families. It is our hope that, with the appropriate revisions, this Bill will be passed into law thereby helping to reduce bicyclist injury among minors and providing them, and the rest of us, with a literal 'piece of mind'.

Possible Resources for Low to No Cost Bicycle Helmets

American Academy for Pediatrics

141 Northwest Point Blvd
Elk Grove Village, IL
(847) 981-7399

Center for Injury Prevention

1007 Ellis Street
Steven's Point, WI
(800) 344-7580

Dean Foundation for Health Research and Education, Inc.

2711 Allen Blvd
Middleton, WI
(608) 836-7000

National SAFE KIDS Campaign

111 Michigan Avenue NW
Washington, DC. 20010-2970
(202) 939-4993

Portage County Child Passenger Safety Association

(715) 341-7328

Riverview Clinic- Janesville

(608) 755-3500

THINK FIRST Foundation

National Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Prevention Program
22 South Washington Street
Park Ridge, IL. 60060
(800) THINK56

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Joanne Pruitt Thunder
Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Program Manager
4802 Sheboygan Ave
PO Box 7936
Madison, WI 53707-7936
(608) 267-3754



URBAN

Wisconsin State Representative • 99th Assembly District

DR. FRANK H. URBAN

Testimony by Representative Frank Urban in support of SB 113

Bicycle helmets are dotting the landscape more and more these days but the majority of children still ride their bikes without them oblivious to the danger they are placing themselves in by riding helmetless.

The number of children wearing helmets on a regular basis has increased in the past few years but according to a study done by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 43% of adults and children never wear helmets and 7% wear helmets less than half the time.

Bicycle helmets can prevent an estimated 85% of serious head injuries, and greatly reduce the risk of severe brain injury that can result in death. However, even a minor brain injury can lead to problems with learning and memory.

Bike-related accidents kill 900 people every year and send about 567,000 people to hospital emergency rooms. About 350,000 of those people are children; 130,00 of those are head injuries suffered in bike crashes. Researchers found that if every rider wore a helmet, 500 deaths and 151,00 nonfatal head injuries could be prevented each year.

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control some evidence suggests that legislative efforts related to helmet use are more effective than school or community programs alone. By early 1999, 15 states and more than 65 local governments had enacted some form of bicycle helmet legislation; most pertaining to children and adolescents. These laws helped increase helmet use among all income groups and in some communities helmet use doubled.

Given statistics like these, it is imperative that we pass SB 113.

Healthy Sheboygan County



P.O. Box 442 Sheboygan, WI 53082-0442

Good morning. My name is Jeri Dreikosen and I am here on behalf of the Healthy Sheboygan County 2010 Child Injury Prevention Committee. I am a Public Health Nurse in Sheboygan County but, more importantly, I am here on behalf of all children because I am a Mom.

You've heard (or will hear) plenty of statistics today on why helmets are needed. All the stats in the world mean nothing to you unless you can personalize them. I'm here to give you examples.

This summer one of the daughters(a 15 year old) of a dietician I work with, had a bike accident. Their family was bike-riding up in Door County and going down a hill. Her tire got caught between the blacktop and the gravel and head over heels she went—over the handlebars and landed on her head. Here is the helmet she wore that day to prove it! As you can see by the helmet's markings, if she had not had the helmet on she very well could have been killed. Her mom feels the helmet saved her life. Now tell me, how many 15 year-olds even wear helmets? They would if there were a helmet law! The general public will never hear of this incident and I wonder how many other "incidents" there are that we never hear of? I am here today as her voice as well as the voice of her parents--helmets save lives!!!

Then there are the stories I told of the last time I was here—a story of a 12 year old girl in Sheboygan who got hit by a truck while riding her bicycle and was not wearing a helmet and was killed. A 12 year old... Rachel's death has made a big impact on many lives. I wonder what she would say about a helmet law if she were alive today-but she's not alive and we are and I am here on her behalf as well.

And, of course, the most important example of all-you see is of my very own daughter, Elizabeth. I am here on her behalf. Two summers ago, Elizabeth was hit by a car while riding her bicycle. But THANK GOD she was wearing a helmet that day and has been required to wear a helmet since she's been old enough to ride a bike. NOONE knows what I went through that day when I personally saw that young teen back carelessly out of the driveway, not seeing my little 5 year old daughter and the words

MOMMY....echoing in my ears. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to go through in my entire life, watching her fly through the air into the street, feeling helpless. But I wasn't totally helpless—Elizabeth did have her helmet on and when she hit the pavement she hit her helmet and not her head. Now, tell me how many 5 year-olds wear a helmet? They would if there were a helmet law! Elizabeth walked away that day with 3 broken fingers and a terrified mother with thoughts of.... What if?

But why should any parent have to question what if? The wearing of a bike helmet should not be a luxury but a necessity. A helmet law would definitely enable parents to enforce the rule of no helmet-- no bike. Children may not know any better but we do, as you have heard today in the statistics. Let's help the children of this state because if we don't-- then who will?

The last time I was here a few people argued that families cannot afford to purchase helmets for their children—there are a number of agencies in Sheboygan that will give away a helmet if you cannot afford one so that can not be an excuse to vote against this legislation. Counties can find a way to provide resources for their residents. Still other people argued that legislation without education is for naught. In Sheboygan County, we have launched an education campaign for the past 5 years, at least, and we say education without legislation is not working!!!! We need a helmet law!!!

On behalf of Healthy Sheboygan County 2010, I appreciate the time given to me to speak and urge you to pass Senate Bill 113.

Jeri L. Dreikosen, RN, BSN
Public Health Nurse
Co-Chairperson, Healthy Sheboygan County 2010 Child Injury Prevention Committee

Jeffrey W. Britton, MD
Fellow, American Academy of Pediatrics
Sheboygan, WI

Remarks in favor of **Senate Bill 113**
September 12, 2001

Good Morning.

My name is Jeff Britton, and I am a Pediatrician from Sheboygan. I represent two organizations, the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Childhood Injury Prevention Committee of Healthy Sheboygan County 2010. I am here to speak in favor of Senate Bill 113.

There is no doubt that bicycle helmets save lives. Although bike riding is a fun, healthy activity, providing exercise and energy-efficient transportation, it is also inherently dangerous. Bicycle injuries are a leading cause of death among school-aged children. Nearly 400,000 children visit emergency rooms annually in the United States for bicycle-related injuries, and at least 250 under 15 die from these injuries. The cost of such incidents is unacceptably high.

Using a bicycle helmet is the best way to reduce the risk of serious head injury and death from a bike accident. Over 70% of bicycle-related deaths are from head injuries. Studies show that bicycle helmets reduce the risk of serious head injury by as much as 85%. It is estimated that each \$10-\$15 spent on a bicycle helmet saves this country at least \$30 in direct health care costs and as much as \$365 in other societal costs.

The organizations I represent have been dedicated to promoting helmet use among Wisconsin children for the past several years. The American Academy of Pediatrics has promoted nationwide educational efforts, in an attempt to persuade parents to obtain helmets for their children and enforce their use. They have developed pamphlets, encouraged pediatricians to educate their patients, and have served as a resource for community officials interested in making bicycle helmet use mandatory. They have worked with other organizations, such as the National Safe Kids Campaign, to establish low cost helmet programs throughout the state and country.

In Sheboygan County, our Childhood Injury Prevention Committee has spent over 5 years promoting bike helmet use. Through the efforts of our committee members and the organizations they represent, we placed posters along local bike trails, worked with the local news media to educate the public, and provided bike safety education through recreation departments, schools, and police departments. In attempt to remove barriers to helmet use, both of our local hospital organizations now offer low cost helmet programs, both at their facilities and also at virtually every community event in Sheboygan County. Children and adults alike can now purchase an 8 dollar bike helmet at a location less than 15 minutes away from their home. Despite all these efforts, our occasional surveys have

not seen local helmet use rise from the 20-25% range over the last several years. Even the tragic death of a Sheboygan girl, struck while biking with out a helmet three years ago, failed to boost helmet use measurably. Although education and easy access to helmets are important, I am convinced that they will not be enough to improve our helmet use rates.

There is evidence that legislation can be effective at improving bicycle helmet use. Recent legislation in Howard County, MD raised helmet use among children from 4 to 47%, while promotional efforts elsewhere have only led to a 19-20% use rate, a number consistent with our own findings in Sheboygan. Such legislation can clearly have a tremendous impact, saving lives and preventing serious injuries.

The vast majority of children I talk to own a bicycle helmet and they are encouraged to wear it. Unfortunately, as they get older their use of the helmet is less and less consistent. When I ask older children if they wear their bike helmet, the standard answer I get is "sometimes." The parents express frustration at getting their children to keep their helmets on. This illustrates our present problem well. Without a law mandating helmet use, we rely solely on parental supervision to enforce helmet use. However, as children get older they are allowed to bike farther from home without their parents riding along. Enforcing a helmet rule is easy if the parent is right there, but not so easy if the child has biked to the other side of town. Senate Bill 113 would allow our law enforcement agencies to assist parents in enforcing the helmet rules they have already established. This is not state interference with parenting, it is state support of parenting.

In summary, the benefits of bicycle helmet use are well established. Bicycle helmets are widely available, and several low cost helmet programs are in place throughout the state. Bicycle helmet education is everywhere: in schools, recreation departments, doctor's offices, Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts, along bike trails. Parents have listened, and more and more young children receive a bike helmet when they get their first bike. However, as these children get older and begin to bike away from home and parental supervision, their helmet use becomes inconsistent and infrequent. Only legislation such as Senate Bill 113 can fix this problem and keep these young bike riders safe from death and serious injury while biking on our roadways.

I hope that you will support Senate Bill 113. Thank you for listening.


Jeffrey W. Britton, MD, FAAP

- Co-chairman, Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention, Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Co-chairman, Childhood Injury Prevention Committee, Healthy Sheboygan County 2010
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2810 N 6th St
Sheboygan, WI 53083
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The Sheboygan Clinic
2414 Kohler Memorial Drive
Sheboygan, WI 53081

State Medical Society of Wisconsin

Working together, advancing the health of the people of Wisconsin



**TO: Senator Judy Robson, Chair
Members, Senate Human Services and Aging Committee**

FROM: Maureen O'Brien, Associate Director, State Legislation

DATE: September 12, 2001

RE: Support for Bike Helmets, SB 113

The use of bicycle helmets can prevent more than 80% of head injuries, many of which lead to death. That's why the State Medical Society reiterates its support for this bill, which would protect children from preventable brain injuries. Many riders and parents of riders do not realize that a helmet is necessary and that it is so effective at preventing injuries. A law requiring bike helmets for minors would serve as a powerful educational tool, given that head injuries are the leading cause of death in bike crashes, and the primary cause of permanent disability. What follows is evidence for why this bill is essential in protecting Wisconsin children.

- Helmet use is lowest, only 11%, among children ages 11 – 14. (*Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control*)
- More than 40% of all head injury-related deaths and approximately 75% of injuries occur among children ages 14 and under. (*Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control*)
- Nearly 60% of all childhood bicycle-related deaths occur on minor roads and most within one mile of the bicyclist's home. (*Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control*)
- In New Jersey, since the mandatory bike helmet law was passed (under age 14 passed in 1992) the **number of bicycle-related fatalities for children under age 14 has fallen by 60%**. (*Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control*)
- If 85% of all child bicyclists wore helmets, the lifetime medical cost savings would be between \$109 million and \$142 million. (*Source: National Safe Kids Campaign*)
- Treating a bike-related head injury is expensive and the medical costs may last a lifetime. In 1991 bike crashes to children (age 4 – 15) caused 52,000 nonfatal head injuries and 93,000 nonfatal face and scalp injuries. Lifetime medical costs for these children will approach \$200 million. (*Source: Children's Safety Network Economics and Insurance Resource Center, Landover, MD*)
- Every bike helmet saves health insurers \$29 and auto insurers \$12. These cost savings do not include time and money saved by parents caring for injured children or lawyers' time and fees filing lawsuits seeking compensation for child cyclist injuries. (*Source: Children's Safety Network Economics and Insurance Resource Center, Landover, MD*)

The State Medical Society supports legislation that requires all minor bicycle riders and bicycle passengers to wear approved protective bicycle helmets. In addition, we support requiring evidence of ownership of a bicycle helmet prior to selling a child's bicycle. Seventeen states have already enacted legislation requiring youth to wear bicycle helmets. Wisconsin should be the next state to protect kids from preventable brain injuries and death.

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

Senate Bill 113

Senate Bill 113 relates to the use of bicycle helmets and provides a penalty. The committee held a public hearing on the bill on September 12, 2001. Senator Robson would like the committee to vote on this bill. Please record your vote below and return this ballot to Senator Robson's office by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, October 12, 2001.

Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye
 Nay

Signed: Carol Roessler Date: Oct. 9, 2001

I am open to discussion
with a lesser age is 12 or 14.

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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed: _____

Robert Ulrich

Date: _____

Oct 10, 2001

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

Senate Bill 113

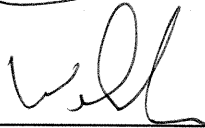
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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed: _____



Date: _____

10/18/01

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed: Ted Kamm

Date: 10/10/2001

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed: _____

Dave Hansen

Date: _____

10/12/01

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

Senate Bill 113

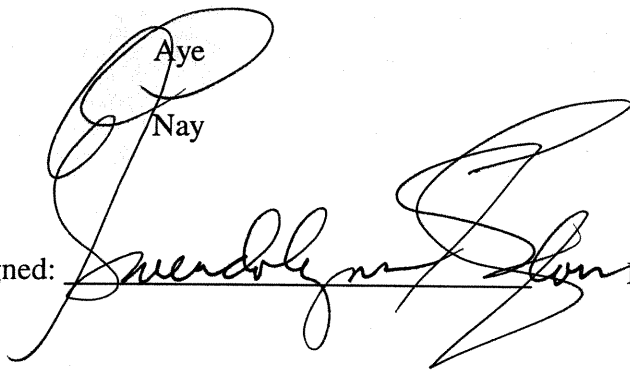
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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed:



Date:

16 Oct 2001

Robson

Senate Committee on Human Services and Aging
Paper Ballot

Senate Bill 113

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Moved by Senator Robson that Senate Bill 113 be recommended for passage.

Aye

Nay

Signed: DA

Date: _____