

Mandatory Helmet Law Targeted By Opponents

NC Motorcyclists like Sherwood Newkirk must wear helmets, but opponents organize to repeal the law

KNIGHTDALE, NORTH CAROLINA, USA, July 23, 2014 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Sherwood Newkirk](#) likes to blow off steam by getting on his motorcycle and riding the highways and byways in and around Knightdale, North Carolina, where he lives and runs a small business called Sherwood Cleaning Service.

But under North Carolina's mandatory helmet law, [Sherwood Newkirk](#) is required to wear a helmet whenever he decides to take a ride. The law has countless North Carolina riders up in arms, and they are working hard to repeal it.

"As far as we're concerned, it boils down to a matter of freedom of choice," said Charlie Boone, Vice President of North Carolina's Concerned Bikers Association. "We try to present an honest picture of it, and that's what we're going to do, period."

The repeal effort is back in committee now, after falling short a year ago. Lawmakers referred it to the Senate Rules Committee, but this past June it went to the Senate Transportation Committee.

"North Carolina has the most effective motorcycle helmet law in the country in terms of lives and health care costs saved," one of its advocates says, citing reduced costs to the state in treating motorcycle-related injuries. About a third of those costs, to the tune of about nineteen million dollars, are covered by the public through the state Medicaid program, or by charges for uninsured motorcyclists care.

[Sherwood Newkirk](#) says that riding his motorcycle is one of the great pleasures he has after a long day at work. His business, Sherwood Cleaning Service, provides cleaning services to private homes and commercial buildings. It's hard work, and as the owner, Sherwood Newkirk is obliged to put in long hours each and every week. Riding his motorcycle is a great stress reliever.



Sherwood Newkirk enjoys old cars and motorcycles and says riding his bike in Knightdale, North Carolina area is a total blast.

Still, the proposal to roll back the state's mandatory helmet law has its supporters, who insist the bill is needed. "North Carolina can expect [the state's share of injury-related] costs to increase twenty to forty percent if the current universal motorcycle helmet law is weakened," a supporter said.

North Carolina is one of nineteen states with universal helmet requirements for people on motorcycles, like Sherwood Newkirk. The remaining states have partial requirements or have no use law, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Safety advocates insist that helmet laws are needed. Helmets are estimated to reduce by 37 percent the likelihood of a motorcycle crash death, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Motorcycle-related deaths have increased 55 percent since 2000, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

But Charlie Zebulon is having none of it. "Liberty is being able to chart your own course without fear of retribution from the state, so this is a liberty issue," he insists. "The education of motorists and motorcyclists is what saves lives."

Most measures introduced into the North Carolina legislature have failed. Rep. John Torbett, R-Gaston, a motorcyclist and primary sponsor of the bill to roll back portions of the mandatory helmet law, said he takes off his helmet when he rides into South Carolina, which grants a no-helmet option to riders aged 21 and older.

Some opponents of mandatory helmet laws have argued fatality rates in states with strict helmet requirements aren't statistically different from those that have exceptions for adults or none at all.

About: Motorcyclists like Sherwood Newkirk are required to wear helmets, but opponents organize to repeal the law.

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