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Subject: Consideration to delay vote on bicycle helmet legislation
Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2021 3:10:40 PM

Esteemed Board of Health members,

I am reaching out to ask that you consider a delay in the potential upcoming vote to change and repeal the bicycle helmet law at the Board of Health meeting this week.

In addition to my roles as Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Washington, Director of Safe and Active Transportation at the Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center, and Vice-President of the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, I am fortunate to care for injured children and teens at Harborview Medical Center, including serious brain injury. We do so much so well at Harborview. Unfortunately, we are not able to “repair” brain injury as we do nearly every other injury; our role is to head off the death of additional brain cells as best we can. Working with injured kids is a gift; however when an injury might easily have been prevented with the use of a helmet, it weighs on families and providers alike. Helmets absolutely prevent brain injury. And as we have seen in other areas, education and outreach are great, but helmet use goes up when the law backs up public health. Parents and caregivers have confidence in you to be arbiters of evidence-based laws.

We also share a profound commitment to identify and combat systemic racism, including inequalities in the enforcement of public safety laws. Racism, like brain injury, leaves scars and disability. However, we and our children deserve to get home safely, brain intact, dignity preserved. **On behalf of the kids and families we care for, I hope you will consider delaying the vote on bicycle helmet legislation so that further discussion can explore how we can both prevent brain injury, improve bicycle safety measures, make access to bicycles and helmets more equitable, and add visibility and accountability to the enforcement of critical public health measures such as the bicycle helmet legislation.**

We have also [written an OpEd published in the Seattle Times today](#), beseeching that we keep evidence-based bicycle helmet legislation as helmets are critical to preventing brain injury. The Op-Ed also emphasizes opportunities to combat racism in law enforcement and the availability and access for individuals and communities who continue to face inequality.

My colleagues at Harborview have conducted the seminal work which provided the foundation for this law. Dr Frederick Rivara, at the Harborview Injury Prevention Research Center (copied here) championed this effort. His study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1989 revealed that bicycle helmets reduced brain injuries by 88%. This study led to the current law in King County to wear helmets when riding a bicycle. This is the same law that is before the Board of Health this Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 1pm for a vote to repeal the mandate to be replaced by an

education only component. Wearing a helmet prevents traumatic brain injuries in a public healthcare system already flooded and overwhelmed.

I would strongly ask that the Board of Health consider delaying this vote to allow for a dialogue and means to further both the goals of preventing brain injuries as well as disparities and unfair enforcement actions.

Thank you. We share a deep gratitude for your commitment to public service as we navigate and advocate for the equitable wellbeing of our community.

Dr. Beth Ebel

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