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NEW JERSEY

COMMITTEES:

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TRANSPORTATION

ENVIRONMENT AND
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HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2006

Dear Governor:

On August 22, 2006, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced that 4,553 people died in motorcycle crashes last year, an increase of 14 percent over the number who died in 2004. In one decade, the number of U.S. motorcycle-related deaths has now doubled. Furthermore, almost half of these deaths involve riders who are not wearing helmets.

Despite this awful trend, thirty states still do not have all-rider motorcycle helmet laws. In fact, in the past year seven state legislatures have even attempted to repeal current helmet laws. In order to curtail the growth of this epidemic, states must pass and preserve these important safety laws. The USDOT has found that helmets reduce the likelihood of a crash death by 37 percent, and some researchers have found them to reduce this risk by as much as 50 percent. All-rider helmet laws result in nearly 100 percent helmet usage.

It is well-documented that our society as a whole pays the price for motorcycle crashes. The USDOT estimates that in one year (2002), \$853 million in costs would have been saved if all motorcyclists had worn helmets. These costs include medical care, rehabilitation, lost productivity, and legal and insurance costs. In many cases, these costs are not borne by the riders, but rather by public institutions.

To address this problem, last year we attempted to reinstate the federal helmet requirement. Since Congress repealed this requirement in 1995, motorcycle deaths have doubled, and six states have repealed all-rider motorcycle helmet laws. The experiences of these states have been horrific. Within the first year after repeal, these states averaged a 53 percent increase in motorcycle deaths from the year before the repeal.

All-rider motorcycle helmet laws save lives, and it is urgent that we come to grips with this national epidemic. As further federal legislation is contemplated to address the problem, please let us know if your state plans to take action to pass or repeal motorcycle helmet laws. We would appreciate hearing from your staff on this matter; please feel free to have them contact my senior transportation counsel – David Matsuda at (202) 224-3224 – at their convenience in order to have this information to develop appropriate legislation.

Sincerely,

