



## With helmets, bikers say they want a choice

**By Krista Kano/Daily News correspondent**

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BOSTON — Over a dozen motorcyclists came to the State House yesterday to advocate for bills they say would give them more riding freedom.

Massachusetts law requires all riders and their passengers to wear helmets, but bills discussed at a Joint Committee on Transportation hearing would give motorcyclists over 21 years old the option of not wearing helmets.

"Currently, 30 states allow free choice. Massachusetts is in the minority," Jimi Ricci of Waltham, former chairman of the Massachusetts Motorcycle Association's board of directors, told the legislators.

States offering the choice include Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire, which combined have about 250,000 registered motorcycles, said Paul Cote, New England region road riding delegate to the American Motorcycle Association.

Cote called the issue an economic one, claiming it costs local businesses \$3 million a weekend when Massachusetts motorcyclists go out of state for helmetless excursions. Cote, an Amesbury resident, said the law is also keeping out-of-state riders from spending money in Massachusetts during motorcycle season.

Brain injury advocates, though, warn about the lifelong costs of getting hurt. A brain injury could cost as much as \$9 million, the Brain Injured Association of Massachusetts says. And riders not wearing helmets are three times more likely to have traumatic brain injuries than those wearing them, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Commission.

Cote also argued the bill should be amended to give riders over the age of 18 the option, rather than over 21.

"I support adult choice, and I consider 18-year-olds an adult," Cote said.

Cote and Ricci had the support of most of the room, with only one man speaking against the bill and for helmet use.

"Motorcycle riders only think about choice, not consequences," said Robert S. Edwards, who has suffered from a brain injury for 58 years, but whose injuries are not motorcycle-related.

Edwards, a 21-year resident of Framingham who now lives in Wellesley, is a volunteer with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, based in Westborough.

"I don't think I violate motorcycle rights, but I attack them because they're not being held responsible," he said.

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