

# Senate Transportation Committee

*Kat Bourque 271-3093*

**SB 27**, relative to grip height and handlebars of motorcycles.

**Hearing Date:** January 10, 2017

**Time Opened:** 1:59 PM

**Time Closed:** 2:20 PM

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Birdsell, Gannon, Ward, Watters and McGilvray

**Members of the Committee Absent:** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill repeals restrictions on grip height and handlebars on motorcycles.

**Sponsors:**

Sen. French  
Rep. Hill

Sen. Reagan

Sen. Avard

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**Who supports the bill:** Senator Avard, Darryl Perry (Liberty Lobby LLC), Rick Belanger, Charlie St. Claire (Director, Laconia Motorcycle Week), Alan Buttrick (New Hampshire Motorcyclist Rights Organization), Steven Beaurivage (New Hampshire Motorcyclists Rights Organization)

**Who opposes the bill:** Stephen Kace (Department of Safety)

**Who is neutral on the bill:** No one

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

*Josh Elliott-Traficante*

*Senate Staff*

- This bill was introduced by the Senate's Policy Director on behalf of Senator French, who was unable to attend the bill's hearing.

*Rick Belanger*

- Mr. Belanger is in support of the bill.
- Mr. Belanger rides a motorcycle and does not have tall handlebars, but doesn't think this would be an issue if the law were repealed.
- Mr. Belanger agreed that keeping the second sentence in the current RSA is important.
- He added that he does not see a lot of law enforcement occurring regarding this issue.

*Charlie St. Claire*

*Executive Director, Laconia Motorcycle Week*

- Mr. St. Claire has been riding a motorcycle since 1966.

- He added that he recalls when there were no laws concerning handlebar height and when the idea of motorcycles was changing in the late 1960s.
- When helmet laws and anti-motorcycle laws came into play, handlebar restrictions were implemented because high handlebars made motorcycles seem even more dangerous.
- Mr. St. Claire has found in his research no written proof of high handlebars being a safety hazard. Had he ever found information proving them to be dangerous, he would not support this bill on the topic. He added that many individuals will say that high handlebars must be a hazard if it impairs one's vision on the road.  
Factory handlebars are not thick and shouldn't impair an operator's vision. Helmets can impair one's peripheral vision much more while operating a motorcycle.
- If the motorcycle has defective handlebars, it is unlikely that it will pass inspection.
- Mr. St. Claire believes it is dangerous that individuals will loosen and pull down their handlebars and so that an officer doesn't pull them over. He added that this practice seems more dangerous than high handlebars.
- An officer makes a judgment call on whether or not the handlebars are too high. This judgment call causes a lot of trouble for motorcyclists who visit state.
- 17 states have no restrictions regarding handlebar height.
- Mr. St. Claire added that he has seen state troopers pull over individuals for handlebar height issues, but is unsure if they received tickets.
- Referring to Mr. Kace's argument that one's line of vision is impaired while riding with high handlebars, Mr. St. Claire stated that whether one has high handlebars or not, if he or she is turning their motorcycle, they won't be looking in your direction. If a handlebar truly obstructs your view, Mr. St. Claire believes that these individuals probably should not be riding their motorcycle.
- In regards to the second sentence referenced in the relevant RSA, Mr. St. Claire stated that he is unsure as to what a defective handlebar is. If the problem is that the handlebar is loosely secured together, etc., he believes that this would be flagged during inspection and the motorcycle wouldn't be able to be driven.
- Senator Watters clarified that it appears if the committee were to repeal this section of the law, there would be no capacity for an inspector to deal with this issue.

### **Summary of testimony presented in opposition :**

*Stephen Kace*

*Department of Safety (DOS)*

- DOS opposes this bill. Mr. Kace added that the legislature has seen many versions of this bill over the years to address the height of grips on motorcycles.
- Mr. Kace asked the committee to keep in mind that if the current law is repealed, other important safety factors mentioned in the second sentence of the RSA will be removed as well.
- He noted that as far as the height of handlebars, the bars themselves are not an issue, but simply the grips where the rider has their hands while he or she is in control of the motorcycle.
- During times like motorcycle week in New Hampshire, individuals will loosen their grips on their handlebars and raise them back up when they are out of sight of officers.
- Mr. Kace explained that one technique taught to operators of motorcycles is to make eye contact with passenger vehicle operators to ensure they are seen. There is the opportunity for an obstructed view if the handlebar grips are at the extended height

- being proposed by this legislation.
- The Department believes that a complete repeal of this law would result in an inherent reduction in safety.
  - Senator Watters confirmed that regardless of the repeal of the law regarding handlebar heights, the second sentence of RSA 266:77 should remain in law. Mr. Kace stated that this was correct.
  - Senator Watters asked what other states are doing to address this issue. Mr. Kace stated that he was unsure, but could gather this information for the committee.
  - Senator Birdsell asked if New Hampshire citizens get singled out at events like Motorcycle Week because of this law. Mr. Kace stated that they do not.

**Neutral Information Presented:** N/A

**Future Action:** Ought to Pass with Amendments

KAB

Date Hearing Report completed: January 11, 2017