



more, better & safer bicycling

March 31, 2026

To: Chair LaMountain and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

RE: Support for S2604: Relating to Motor and Other Vehicles – Definitions and General Code

Bari Freeman
Executive Director

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Dear Chair LaMountain and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express our support for elements of Senate Bill S2604 sponsored by Senator Dawn Euer to improve use and safety of e-bikes. E-bikes are increasingly popular, an affordable means of transportation, an important mode for people to stay active and healthy, and an important contributor to reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

It is vital to continue to refine our practices and our laws to keep in step with the growing popularity of e-bikes. We are grateful that this bill addresses several needed improvements. We offer the following recommendations from the perspective of the communicators and collaborators working to improve understanding and safe practices. With your help, our goal is to ensure clarity for use by law enforcement, educators, and community members in service to those whom the laws intend to protect and make safer.

- 1) Prior to this “clean-up bill,” the only reference to an age restriction or e-bike operation was buried in a law related to registration of motor vehicles. While use was growing by younger people under the age of 16, police officers and educators could not clearly quote or reference this restriction in public outreach. At Bike Newport, we worked closely with our Chief of Police and his staff, and our Superintendent of Schools and her staff, to determine how to communicate this law to our students and families while the language of the law was so confusing.

Support:

The update of section 31-1-3(g) in this bill to clearly state that you must be 16 years of age to operate an electric bicycle is extremely helpful in our collective and collaborative work for safer streets. We have attached our letter regarding the related House Bill H7789.

- 2) The varied types of e-bikes, methods of powering them, and potential speed create challenges and confusion as to how they may be used safely. Rhode Island previously joined the other states in the union to define three classes of e-bikes.

Bill 2604 goes further to address more powerful vehicles that are not included in these three classifications by creating a “Class 4” for vehicles that travel over 28mph.

While we recognize and appreciate the need to differentiate these vehicles, we submit that they are NOT e-bikes and should not be defined or classified as such. Rather than introducing a “Class 4” - which differs from state and federal guidelines - we recommend the following language based on a model currently in place in California, in progress in other states, and recommended by the People for Bikes.

Importantly, this method addresses vehicles manufactured for high speed as well as vehicles made to achieve high speed through aftermarket modifications. Additionally,

this method provides the early steps of holding retailers responsible not to misrepresent these powerful motorized vehicles as e-bikes to consumers.

Recommendation:

- **Do not add a Class 4 to the definition of Electric Bicycles.**
- **Do add a new section b1 to RI 31-19.7-1:**

(b1) The following vehicles are not electric bicycles under this code and shall not be advertised, sold, offered for sale, or labeled as electric bicycles:

(1) A vehicle with two or three wheels powered by an electric motor that is designed to attain a speed greater than 20 miles per hour on motor power alone, or greater than 28 miles per hour via pedal assist, or to attain more than 750 watts of power.

(2) A vehicle that is modified to attain a speed greater than 20 miles per hour on motor power alone, or greater than 28 miles per hour via pedal assist, or to have motor power of more than 750 watts.

(3) A vehicle that is modified to have its operable pedals removed.”

- 3) In 31-1-3(g): use of the term "electric motorized bicycle" as an alternative to "electric bicycle" might lead to confusion because in 31-19.1-1 the "motorized bicycle" refers to a different type of vehicle altogether.

The recommended update will greatly help reduce confusion, improve clarity and, with it, result in safer practices.

Recommendation:

- a) In section 31-1-3(g), **remove the term "electric motorized bicycle"** and only use the terms "electric bicycle" or "e-bike."

We work closely with our partners at the Newport Police Department and are currently working on public awareness initiatives with all three municipalities, police departments, and school districts on Aquidneck Island. We also are providing free classes – both online and on-bike – for e-bike riders. We stand ready to assist this Committee in any way we can to finalize refinements to the laws related to e-bikes and e-bike safety.

Thanks to Senator Euer and to all members of this Committee for addressing these improvements to code and with that the safety of all road users.

On behalf of the Bike Newport Board of Directors and Staff, thank you for your consideration, and always for your service.

With best regards,



Bari Freeman, Executive Director

State of California

VEHICLE CODE

Section 312.5

312.5. (a) An “electric bicycle” is a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor that does not exceed 750 watts of power.

(1) A “class 1 electric bicycle,” or “low-speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle,” is a bicycle equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling, that is not capable of exclusively propelling the bicycle, except as provided in paragraph (4), that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour, and that is not capable of providing assistance to reach speeds greater than 20 miles per hour.

(2) A “class 2 electric bicycle,” or “low-speed throttle-assisted electric bicycle,” is a bicycle equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the bicycle, and that is not capable of providing assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour.

(3) A “class 3 electric bicycle,” or “speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle,” is a bicycle equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling, that is not capable of exclusively propelling the bicycle, except as provided in paragraph (4), and that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 28 miles per hour, and equipped with a speedometer.

(4) A class 1 or class 3 electric bicycle may have start assistance or a walk mode that propels the electric bicycle on motor power alone, up to a maximum speed of 3.7 miles per hour.

(b) A person riding an electric bicycle, as defined in this section, is subject to Article 4 (commencing with Section 21200) of Chapter 1 of Division 11.

(c) On and after January 1, 2017, manufacturers and distributors of electric bicycles shall apply a label that is permanently affixed, in a prominent location, to each electric bicycle. The label shall contain the classification number, top assisted speed, and motor wattage of the electric bicycle, and shall be printed in Arial font in at least 9-point type.

(d) The following vehicles are not electric bicycles under this code and shall not be advertised, sold, offered for sale, or labeled as electric bicycles:

(1) A vehicle with two or three wheels powered by an electric motor that is intended by the manufacturer to be modifiable to attain a speed greater than 20 miles per hour on motor power alone or to attain more than 750 watts of power.

(2) A vehicle that is modified to attain a speed greater than 20 miles per hour on motor power alone or to have motor power of more than 750 watts.

(3) A vehicle that is modified to have its operable pedals removed.

(Amended by Stats. 2024, Ch. 791, Sec. 2. (SB 1271) Effective January 1, 2025.)



more, better & safer bicycling

TO: Chair Shanley and members of the House State Government and
Elections Committee
RE: Support for H7789

Bari Freeman
Executive Director

Date: March 2, 2026

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Dear Chair Shanley and Honorable Members of the State Government and Elections Committee,

I am writing regarding H7789 (Boylan, Furtado, Potter, Serpa, Speakman, Kazarian, Caldwell, Tanzi, and Handy), which would make changes to the laws pertaining to electric bicycles.

We are grateful that these issues are being considered legislatively and make the following recommendations to ensure that the resulting legislation is accessible and shareable by educators, law enforcement, and those it intends to make safer.

- 1) Regarding restricting operation of an e-bike to those over 16 years of age:
 - Currently in state code 31-3-2.2, the restriction is buried in a vehicle registration law.
 - This bill proposes locating the age restriction in a definition of e-bikes. The definition section does not otherwise include rules related to the defined vehicle.
 - Ideally, the law should exist in a freestanding statute in the section entitled Operation of a Bicycle and should clearly state: **Electric bicycles shall not be operated by a person under the age of 16 years.**
 - We recommend that the same adjustment be made to the bill's recommendations regarding Personal Mobility Devices.

2) Further we recommend against defining Personal Mobility Devices as bicycles.

3) We recommend that 28mph in these definitions refer to "assisted speed" not "maximum speed" as it is not uncommon for an unpowered bicycle to exceed 28mph on a downhill slope.

We are currently working on these refinements at the local and state level together with our Chief of Police and through him with the Association of the Police Chiefs of Rhode Island, and request that you pause on finalizing these updates so we can share with you the result of these efforts to align language across ordinances.

We are prepared to assist in this process as requested.

On behalf of the board, staff, and participants of Bike Newport, thank you for your consideration, and always for your service,


Bari Freeman, Executive Director