



**Ohio Chapter**

**Testimony of Sarah Denny, MD, FAAP**

House Bill 226—Fireworks Legalization

*June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Sarah Denny and I am here today on behalf of the nearly 3,000 members of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to urge your opposition to House Bill 226.

I am a pediatrician in a busy pediatric Emergency Department and the advocacy co-chair for the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. In addition to my clinical responsibilities, I am active in the field of injury and poison prevention. I sit on injury prevention committees at local, state and national levels, including the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Executive Committee for the Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Throughout my career I have cared for children who have been injured by fireworks in Ohio. I am proud to reside in a state that cares enough about child safety to prohibit the discharge of consumer fireworks, and I hope the committee will maintain that commitment and oppose HB 226.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's latest Fireworks Report, fireworks were responsible for approximately 11,900 injuries treated at hospital emergency rooms in 2015. This data does not capture injuries treated at other facilities, including outpatient clinics, trauma centers, and urgent care centers. Here are some interesting facts about these 11,900 injuries—

- In 2015, 26% of fireworks related injuries were to children younger than 15 years of age. 42% of fireworks related injuries were to individuals younger than 20 years of age;
- Children ages 5 to 9 have the second highest rate of ER visits for fireworks related injuries of any age group (4.2 injuries per 100,000 people). Young adults aged 15 to 19 have the highest rate of ER visits for fireworks related injuries of any age group (6.1 injuries per 100,000 people);
- Nearly half of fireworks related injuries are to individuals not directly involved in the discharge of fireworks;
- Injuries increased 13% from 10,500 to 11,900 between 2014 and 2015. Injuries have increased from 8,600 to 11,900 between 2010 and 2015, which is a 38% increase;

Further, a 2016 research project presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting last year found that, as states relaxed laws related to fireworks sales during the past decade, emergency doctors saw an increase in both the number of fireworks related injuries among children and the severity of those injuries. A full copy of the report is attached to my testimony. This report, combined with the documented increase in fireworks injuries in recent years, clearly demonstrate that the relaxing of fireworks laws in by other states are driving an increase in injuries. I do not believe now is the time for Ohio to contribute to this alarming trend.

Further, many critics of Ohio's fireworks law will tell you that the law is often disregarded or not enforced. Every year, we see news reports across the state of injuries to children and damage to property resulting from fireworks discharge. Despite a statewide ban on consumer discharge, we are still seeing the negative effects of consumer fireworks usage. However, this is not a justification for repealing the current prohibition on 1.4g fireworks discharge.

Fireworks are inherently dangerous and we should consider what kind of statement we will make as a state by repealing the consumer fireworks ban. Many supporters of HB 226 would argue that people ought to have the right to discharge fireworks on their property as a display of freedom. Indeed, in a few weeks many of us will gather to celebrate Independence Day with our family and friends and enjoy public fireworks displays. Some Ohioans will purchase and discharge consumer fireworks, and inevitably others will be injured as a result.

Innocent bystanders and children have rights as well, and no one should be put at risk of injury simply because they are near another individual who is discharging consumer fireworks. In 2014, an infant in Northeast Ohio was playing safely in her playpen. Two houses away, a 1.4g tube-launched firework was lit and accidentally knocked over. The projectile went off and landed in the child's playpen, causing severe burns.

This tragedy happened under the current law, which prohibits discharge of 1.4g fireworks. However, this tragedy illustrates the danger of fireworks and the harm that can come to innocent children when consumer fireworks are discharged. Passage of HB 226 would result in a statewide declaration that fireworks are not dangerous. The statistics say otherwise and stories like the one I just shared clearly show the need for a prohibition on discharge of fireworks.

In closing, I urge the committee to oppose HB 226. It is my hope that Ohio will continue to stand up for child health and safety. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.