

Testimony Statement on HB 253 Revise the Fireworks Law

Good morning my name is Sarah Tackett, from Springfield OH and I'm here to speak in opposition of HB253.

I love fireworks on the 4th of July but not the other 364 days of the year, and I have not spoken to one person that favors that. We have to put up with it for generally a whole week which in itself gets pretty annoying. But just being annoyed isn't a reason to ban them the rest of the year. I would like to give you a few reasons.

1. Fireworks have a detrimental effect on our pets and wildlife. The noise from fireworks causes a great amount of fear, stress and anxiety in wild animals. That fear causes them to flee, sometimes abandoning nests or running into roadways. Domestic animals shake in fear and often look for a hiding place or seek comfort wearing a special jacket and being held by their owner. Many dogs perceive fireworks as a real threat, which triggers their "flight" response. They may even show signs of anxiety and restlessness, like panting, whining and pacing. I have personally observed this.
2. Children and adults with sensory issues, such as those seen on the autism spectrum, find fireworks to be an assault on the senses rather than a good time. The sudden noises and brightly colored patterns, mixed with the ambient darkness can actually feel physically painful for those with sensory issues.
3. The mere fact of additional increase in physical injuries such as the loss of fingers, a hand, or even an eye is a high price to pay for legalization of fireworks. The bill currently would prohibit use of fireworks if drinking. Fireworks and drinking seem to go hand in hand and that won't be prevented just because a bill says not to do it.
4. It's been about 3 years since Pennsylvania made it legal for residents to buy and set off bigger fireworks and already the list of people calling for repealing the change is exploding. People are going to municipal meetings to complain about the fire risk posed from neighbors setting them off too close to their homes. They complain about the noise and its effects on pets and children trying to sleep. You need to look at other states where this has become legal.
5. It can end up being an additional burden on our first responders. Fireworks burn down houses, damage entertainment venues, frighten children and adults, cause brushfires, noise from fireworks can cause distress, especially when fireworks sound like gunfire.

That brings me to the main reason that I believe fireworks should not be made legal 365 days a year and that is the effect on our veterans who suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is unfortunately common in veterans who have seen combat, affecting up to 20% of those who served in Afghanistan or Iraq, and up to 30% of Vietnam veterans according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. I know this

personally as I have a son-in-law who spent his career in the military with one tour in Iraq, and two tours in Afghanistan. He suffers from PTSD, but he may be one of the fortunate ones that didn't serve 6-8 tours or even more.

A hallmark of PTSD is the tendency to experience flashbacks to the traumatic event, which are triggered by environmental stimuli. For war veterans, the bursts of light and explosive sounds of fireworks can easily trigger a flashback to combat.

One year on Independence Day, Kevin Rhoades, a veteran combat marine, planted a sign on his lawn outside his Texas home that bore a simple message, "COMBAT VETERAN LIVES HERE, PLEASE BE COURTEOUS WITH FIREWORKS." They were not; it didn't matter to those around him. Fireworks pose a genuine threat to some PTSD sufferers and can cause them to act out violently. Veterans often say they can tolerate the "planned" fireworks but the sudden ones that erupt in his neighborhood transport him back to Baghdad. One veteran just said that a smell or a sound can take them right back to Fallujah.

Another Georgia veteran with PTSD killed himself after he became agitated by fireworks. And in Wisconsin a veteran with PTSD went outside and fired shots into the air after early fireworks "triggered him". He was arrested on a firearms charge, but he was in his words he was "freaking-out" and thought he was back in Afghanistan.

There is no question that fireworks for some with PTSD are a trigger and cause flashbacks. The rate of suicide among our veterans is at a rate of about one and half times that of the civilian community. These are individuals who have sacrificed much, many the loss of their families for inability to cope with some of the stresses, when they return home.

We owe it to our loving household pets we have, children and adults with special needs, our first responders and most of all our veterans to be considerate of their needs, not just our pure enjoyment.

I am the daughter of a WWII Pacific veteran. I worked for the AF for 38 years. I have a daughter that had an exemplary AF career for 21 years, I have a son-in-law that served over 25 years and was a Chief Master Sergeant, a nephew that was a Lt Col, C-5 Command Pilot and another nephew that was a crew chief on the C-130. I've been very active in our military ministry at my church for five years, and have helped out for two years with the Honor Field at Jackson, Lytle, & Lewis celebration center. I love the military and all our veterans that have served and sacrificed.

For these reasons, I'm pleading with you to NOT support House Bill 253 to legalize fireworks 365 days a year. If there is an overwhelming need to approve something, I would recommend legalizing fireworks limited from 1-7 Jul each year. I would also encourage you to look at other states that may have already passed this legislation. Is it worth the lives of our veterans for the pleasure of a few? I believe this bill is reckless and should not be passed. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.