



Ohio Chapter

Testimony of Bill Cotton, MD, FAAP

Senate Bill 72—Fireworks Legalization

May 29th, 2019

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Bill Cotton 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 Senate Bill 72.

I have served as a pediatrician in a busy pediatric Emergency Department and as the advocacy co-chair for the Ohio Chapter of 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.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's latest Fireworks Report, fireworks were responsible for approximately 12,900 injuries treated at hospital emergency rooms in 2017; the report also attributed eight fatalities to fireworks discharge. 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 12,900 injuries—

- In 2017, 36% of fireworks related injuries were to children younger than 15 years of age. 50% of fireworks related injuries were to individuals younger than 20 years of age;
- Children ages 10 to 14 had the highest rate of ER visits for fireworks related injuries of any age group (5.9 injuries per 100,000 people).
- Nearly half of fireworks related injuries are to individuals not directly involved in the discharge of fireworks;
- Injuries have increased from 8,600 in 2010 to 12,900 in 2017, which is a 50% increase.

Further, a 2016 research project presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in 2017 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. 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 SB 72 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.

Passage of SB 72 would result in a statewide declaration that fireworks are not dangerous; the statistics say otherwise. In closing, I urge the committee to oppose SB 72. 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.