

Nichole Coleman
Veteran, U.S. Air Force
Opponent Testimony — Written
Senate Bill 72



Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee: I appreciate the opportunity to submit written opponent testimony to Senate Bill 72. The legislation is of interest to me for how sweepingly it would deregulate fireworks and what that would mean for the quality of life of many Ohio veterans.

I served in the United States Air Force for 7 years and, more recently, was president of the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers, which represents veterans in every county. Much of my life after my military service has been dedicated to the betterment of the lives of Ohio's veterans in Hancock County and indeed across the state.

It is in that spirit that I submit this testimony on my own behalf. I am one of the many veterans who must contend with post-traumatic stress in my life after military service. Of tremendous help to me is my service dog, Tyson. You may be surprised to know that rates of post-traumatic stress range from 12% of Persian Gulf veterans to 15% of Vietnam veterans to as high as 20% among post-9/11 veterans, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. That equates to some 100,000 veterans in Ohio living every day with post-traumatic stress.

A recent Virginia Tech study noted: "Fireworks on nights other than the Fourth of July or New Year's Eve might be nothing more than inconsiderate neighbors, but for veterans with PTSD, **the shock of noise and light may trigger a deeply-learned expectation of danger.**" For them,

“unexpected surprising events—noise or otherwise—could be matter of life or death.”¹

That this bill both legalizes the discharge of a category of loud and powerful fireworks *and* has such loose standards for when and where the fireworks may be set off is, quite simply, a question of quality of life for many veterans—myself included. We veterans love this country and enjoy celebrating it as much as anyone, but as with all revelry, there is a point after which fun becomes unnecessarily reckless. Fireworks of the magnitude SB 72 would legalize are an unpredictable and unwelcomed factor with which veterans with PTS would have to contend—especially veterans who rely on the otherwise-calm presence of a service animal made frightened and even volatile by fireworks.

My concerns are shared by the AMVETS Department of Ohio, an organization opposed to SB 72 and which boasts 32,000 members in every county of the state, and by the American Legion national executive committee, whose Resolution No. 33 from 2006 reads in part: “Departments and Posts [should] encourage children and their families to enjoy fireworks at public fireworks displays conducted by professionals, rather than purchase fireworks for home or private use.”

I’m happy to add my voice to those of my fellow veterans and medical, public safety, educational, and insurance organizations comprising the Ohio Fireworks Safety Coalition. As senators, your work generally, and for veterans specifically, is always appreciated. Ohio is the desirable home that it is for veterans because of sound policies you’ve enacted in the past. Please continue that good work for veterans in this case. Before you cast your vote on SB 72, consider the views of the broad array of veterans opposed to the legislation. Mine is just one voice but representative of thousands of my and your fellow Ohioans who have come home from military service and deserve to live their lives as peaceably as possible.

Yours very respectfully,

Nichole Coleman
United States Air Force Veteran

¹ “Scientists find heightened attention to surprise in veterans with PTSD,” Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, <https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2018/01/vtc-ptsdlearning.html>