

Testimony of Jack, Robin & Stephanie Shannon
Members of the Ohio Fireworks Safety Coalition
HB 172—Fireworks Legalization and Regulation
April 21, 2021

Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and Members of the Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for allowing us to express our opposition of House Bill 172, which would allow consumers in Ohio to use bottle rockets, firecrackers, ground sparklers and missiles (1.4g explosive fireworks). Advocates say these products are safe **but our family's experience is quite different.**

Our son Michael was almost 4 years old when we attended a family reunion over the fourth of July in Kentucky. We had a great day visiting with family, playing games, fishing and of course eating. The evening festivities included a consumer fireworks display put on by responsible family members. Little did anyone know that one firework had enough force to cause the Missile's base to rock, allowing it to tip over and fire across a field towards the crowd of spectators. Michael was standing between his father's legs as the missile launched horizontally across the field. He had reflex time to turn his head before it hit and knocked him to the ground. He was unconscious for a brief time and awoke to severe pain from his injury. We stood by helpless to relieve his pain. Michael endured an open skull fracture with damage similar to a shotgun blast at close range. He had extensive surgery but died of complications the next day.

As parents, you want to believe that you can protect your children. We thought these fireworks were safe because they were legal to buy and use. That did not turn out to be the case.

Fireworks continue to hurt people and cause significant damage to property. Nearly half of serious fireworks' injuries affect innocent bystanders like Michael and over 36% of those injuries are to children under the age of 15! From 2006 to 2012, injuries to children have increased nationwide as restrictions are relaxed. During this time over 90,000 children suffered burn injuries. The number of children hospitalized increased as did the length of time admitted. Allowing increased consumer access will **not** decrease these numbers!

This bill opens up wide unrestricted use of all types of 1.4G fireworks potentially at any time of the day or night. These fireworks are explosive devices and are especially unpredictable. It is unreasonable to believe that consumers will have any idea how these varied products will work. Additionally, the quality of the products being imported is unacceptable. Of the fireworks samples tested in 2019 by the Consumer Product Safety Commission and US Customs and Border Protection, 46% of the products failed to meet FSHA government standards. Most of the violations are related to fuse time and overloaded report. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of products are tested, so the rest of these defective products make it to market and are sold to unsuspecting consumers.

The cost of additional fireworks access by consumers will be, increased property damage, increased injuries, and increased hospital and medical expenses that someone will have to pay. The National Fire Protection Agency states an estimated 19,500 fires started by fireworks were reported to local fire departments in the US during 2018. These fires caused five civilian deaths, 46 civilian injuries and \$105 million in direct property damage.

In closing, do you know a veteran or someone who struggles with PTSD? Do you have a family member who has dementia? Have you ever been in the hospital or at home recovering from surgery or an illness? Do you have pets or livestock? You cannot prepare them for these unexpected scary noises or experiences that may send them into a state of panic or worse back to a traumatic experience that they have had.

As legislators, you have the opportunity to keep Ohio citizens safer by “Voting NO” to this bill because these products are not safe in the hands of inexperienced consumers. Ohioans can still have fireworks as part of their celebrations by attending professional displays. They can also create new traditions that show patriotism without fireworks, like patriotic cooking contests, posters, flags or many other things that are safe traditions for your family. Please think long and hard about the broad ramifications of this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Michael Shannon, Age 3