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October 26th, 2021

The Honorable Frank Hoagland
Chair, Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Ohio Senate
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Hoagland and Members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee—

On behalf of the Ohio Fireworks Safety Coalition, a statewide organization with more than fifty members, we are writing today to express our concerns with House Bill 172. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share these comments and are grateful for your time and attention to this issue.

As you know, HB 172 would allow for fireworks discharge in the State of Ohio year-round with very few restrictions. In its current form, the legislation is more expansive than a companion measure, Senate Bill 113, which was vetoed by Governor DeWine earlier this year. We understand that a substitute bill is being discussed that would narrow the number of days when fireworks can be discharged significantly and make other positive changes. That being said, our coalition continues to believe that the discharge of fireworks in Ohio is inherently dangerous, and we remain opposed to any legislation that would legalize discharge of consumer grade fireworks statewide.

While there have been several hearings on this issue in the past, we are alarmed that HB 172 is being scheduled for possible amendments and a vote in its first hearing before this committee. This allows for little time for interested parties to vet possible changes or discuss

amendments with members of the Ohio Senate. Our members have not been included in interested party discussions on this bill despite a willingness to offer constructive amendment ideas. In the past, we have suggested the following changes to address our concerns—

- In lieu of allowing local governments to prohibit discharge, we suggest created an ‘opt-in’ framework where discharge remains prohibited statewide unless a local government votes to allow discharge within their boundaries
- As an alternative to the opt-in framework, we feel that local governments should be given more robust authority to regulate discharge; this includes restricting the location and manner of discharge as well as establishing permits or other regulatory safeguards
- Remove harmful ‘ground sparkler’ language as other 1.4g devices can only be sold in fireworks retail locations; we should not be circumventing the classifications set forth by the Consumer Products Safety Commission

Given that there are other, more important matters that the Senate could be discussing, we request that you hold off any votes until all interested parties have had a chance to review amendments and discuss the sub bill. Our coalition is committed to participating in this process and protecting Ohioans.

Our concerns are straightforward: legalization of discharge will lead to an increase in fireworks-related injuries, property damage, and fatalities. Fireworks are inherently dangerous, and a statewide prohibition sends a clear message to Ohioans regarding these dangers. Like speed limits and distracted driving, we know that some Ohioans disregard the law and discharge fireworks anyway. This is unfortunate as it puts everyone nearby at risk.

There is still time to find a middle ground and compromise on this issue that will allow for a bill to be passed with no opponents. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and dedication to the health and safety of all Ohioans.

Submitted on behalf of—

Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Prevent Blindness Ohio
Academy of Medicine of Cleveland and Northern Ohio
Ohio State Medical Association
Ohio Academy of Family Physicians
Ohio Insurance Institute
Ohio Ophthalmological Society
Ohio Chapter, American College of Emergency Physicians
Ohio Osteopathic Association