

Testimony of Michael F. Curtin
Former state representative, 17th Ohio House District
1568 Roxbury Rd.
Columbus, Ohio 43212
June 3, 2020

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you in opposition to House Bill 253.

For nearly four decades as a newspaperman, four years as a state representative, and now four years as a retired curmudgeon and volunteer, I've had the privilege of studying public policymaking in our great state.

Over that nearly half-century, this marks only the second time I've ventured forth to testify on legislation, other than the times I offered sponsor testimony on bills during my tenure here.

On both occasions, first in the late 1990s and now today, the overriding issue prompting my concern was the health and safety of our fellow Ohioans, a concern I know we all share.

It's an unfortunate fact that on most measures of health and overall quality of life, Ohio ranks poorly compared to the nation as a whole. On most measures of health and safety, we lag our fellow states.

Here's one notable exception. Compared with the rest of the nation, we send far fewer of our children to emergency rooms with permanent eye injuries, missing fingers and other life-altering casualties.

The reason for this: Our state's longstanding prohibition on the discharge of so-called consumer grade fireworks, which contain up to 500 milligrams of gunpowder.

The Ohio State Fire Officials Association tells us there is no safe way to use these fireworks. All of our hospitals, including our children's hospitals, tell us the same. So do our veterans organizations, our first responders, and our insurance organizations.

Everyone in this state whose mission is to protect the health and well being of Ohioans is unified in opposition to this bill. Almost no one is for it, except for the fireworks industry itself.

This bill, in one fell swoop, would transform Ohio from one of the safest states in the nation to one of the most dangerous when it comes to the discharge of fireworks.

By legalizing discharge of consumer-grade fireworks 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, this bill would give Ohio a more liberal fireworks policy than those of 47 other states.

If ever there were a bill to invite and encourage the use of fireworks by children, this is it.

Ohio's longstanding law on fireworks has served this state well, very well. Especially our children. Our current law is a good and effective law. There is no good reason to abandon it.

There is one other consideration that I believe you should think about very seriously. This bill contains a tax increase, which runs counter to the pledge of no new taxes that a number of you have made to your constituents.

Thank you for allowing me to appear, and thank you for your careful consideration of this issue that is vitally important to the health and safety of all Ohioans.