

TESTIMONY OF JON WILLS

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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. My name is Jon Wills and I have been a physician, patient and public health advocate for more than 45 years. I am testifying today to express my strong opposition to House Bill 172, which would permit Ohioans to discharge consumer grade fireworks in the State of Ohio 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 a year.

There is no absolutely safe way to discharge fireworks in any setting. Displays of any intensity should be left to the professionals. According to the Ohio Department of Health, fireworks cause an average of 120 preventable injuries in Ohio annually that result in visits to the emergency room – 17 percent of the injuries are to the eyes and 25 percent occur to Ohioans under 15 of years of age. Nearly half of all fireworks injuries are to innocent bystanders –many of them children. Of the 10,000 fireworks-related injuries last year, 36 percent were to children under the age of 15, or nearly 3,600 children.

- Fireworks cause traumatic reactions to the explosions for an estimated 100,000 Ohio veterans, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Fireworks cause stress and anxiety for our household pets and farm animals; nearly 62 percent of Ohioans are pet owners.
- Firework discharges already cause mediation and enforcement dilemmas for police departments, fire officials and emergency responders. This bill will dramatically add to the problem.

While I am strongly opposed to HB 172 for public health concerns, this bill also interferes with my rights as a property owner to ensure that my family and house remains safe from loud noises, potential property damage and personal injuries caused by the irresponsible discharge of consumer grade fireworks, particularly during neighborhood parties where alcohol may be present.

True, HB 172 does allow counties, cities and some townships to either ban fireworks or restrict the times and dates for consumer discharge. But the lack of statewide standards will lead to confusion among Ohio consumers and inconsistencies in enforcement for police and fire officials. For example, my home

is currently in the City of Columbus. The property behind my house is in Norwich Township. Norwich Township's law enforcement is handled through an agreement with the City of Hilliard Police Department. I have already experienced problems with open burning and noise issues and problems are seldom if ever resolved on a timely basis. This means as an Ohio taxpayer, I will need to work with three different jurisdictions to pass consistent fireworks ordinances and call two different police departments when fireworks violations occur.

Firework displays in Ohio currently bring people together to celebrate national holidays and other local festivities in a regulated and, hopefully, safer environment. This bill, however, will potentially pit neighbor against neighbor, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days every year. I realize there are many outstanding issues to be resolved with Ohio's existing fireworks moratorium law – and progress was being made in the last session – but HB 172 creates many more new problems than it resolves at the present time. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.