

Testimony of John Liu, MD

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Substitute SB 113 Fireworks Legislation and Regulation

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Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and Members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding Substitute SB 113. My name is John Liu, I am a comprehensive ophthalmologist in Cleveland; I am here today to speak in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 113. I am not here to speak in opposition of fun. I enjoy a good fireworks show as much as anyone else, but I have to speak in opposition of this bill. You will hear, or read moving testimony from my fellow Ohioans who have been significantly affected by the unsafe use of fireworks.

As an ophthalmologist, my duty is to preserve sight and prevent blindness. Fireworks are responsible for 2% of all reported eye injuries and 20% of all fireworks injuries are to the eye. Often these are devastating injuries that can lead to permanent loss of sight. Injuries from fireworks are on the rise, with the highest injury rate in the 10-19 age range. In addition, injury to bystanders are very common in these situations, with one study reporting up to 65% incidence. Knowing this, we must not in good conscience pass this bill that increases risk to the general public.

Let me run you through a scenario: someone is transferred to us because of an eye injury from fireworks; we are immediately concerned about shrapnel injury with possible foreign body inside the eye and possible collateral damage from the gunpowder. Hopefully, it hasn't been hours by the time we are able to see them. The most devastating injury is a ruptured globe, as these can have very poor visual outcomes. These injuries occur in about 17% of all fireworks related eye injuries and can require extensive surgical repair with high potential for permanent vision loss. If you are lucky, you may just have superficial injuries, such as corneal abrasions, bleeding inside the eye and eyelid injuries. While these may be superficial, they may be very visually significant. We also must consider thermal and chemical injury and possible fractures. These are also injuries that often require concurrent care with other specialists.

You will hear and read testimony from my fellow Ohioans whose lives have been permanently changed by firework injury. Not only are these injuries life changing, but also carry a high cost of care. It is our duty to minimize preventable injuries and this is a keystone moment. I urge the members of this committee to vote no on Substitute SB 113 to protect the health and well-being of Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to speak on this important issue.

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