



**Prevent
Blindness**
Our Vision Is Vision.

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TESTIMONY OF SHERILL K. WILLIAMS
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HB 172—Fireworks Legalization and Regulation
October 26th, 2021

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding House Bill 172. I am here today on behalf of the nearly 5,000 volunteers and advocates who support the charitable mission of the Ohio Affiliate of Prevent Blindness Ohio (PBO) – to prevent blindness and preserve sight.

PBO serves as the voice for Ohio consumers when it comes to eye health and safety. Along with the nearly 1 million Ohioans of all ages that benefit from our direct services, we also take an active role in advocacy to promote eye health and safety. This is the reason why I am here today to express opposition to House Bill 172.

Prevent Blindness leads a statewide coalition of 50 organizations representing healthcare providers, hospitals, fire safety officials, businesses, veterans groups, and animal advocates called the Ohio Fireworks Safety Coalition. This large and diverse group has continually opposed fireworks discharge in the Buckeye State. Many of our coalition members are your constituents and feel strongly that this bill will result in more fireworks injuries to Ohioans.

Despite industry warnings and public service announcements, many consumers believe that if something is legalized, it is inherently safe. This is the core of our concern with HB 172. Ohio's prohibition on fireworks discharge sends a clear message to our citizens: fireworks are dangerous.

While this bill provides for some minimal safety measures in the form of a safety pamphlet and availability of safety goggles, the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that 43% of imported fireworks tested were noncompliant containing too much load and fuse violations. 99% of consumer fireworks used in the United States are imported, with 94% coming from China. A safety pamphlet or goggles is not effective protection against defective products.

Just like there is no safe way to drive under the influence or speed, there is no safe way to use fireworks. There are thousands of serious injuries caused by discharge of consumer fireworks every year... and HALF are to innocent bystanders. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, injuries caused by consumer fireworks increased

56% during March-September 2020 to nearly 14,000 injuries! One-third are suffered by children.

This is not a new debate in Ohio. In fact, similar bills have been introduced in the past four General Assemblies. In each instance, advocates such as Prevent Blindness have come to the Statehouse to share concerns and stories of fireworks injuries and fatalities. Proponents of the bill generally represent the fireworks industry and not consumers or constituents.

Currently, Ohio is one of the four safest states when it comes to backyard fireworks with a decades-long ban on consumer discharge. Passage of House Bill 172 in its current form opens Ohio to being among the most dangerous states.

We all believe in freedom and patriotism, but recognize that roughly half of all fireworks injuries are to innocent bystanders, not to the individual actually lighting the fireworks. Many injuries are to children and fireworks often have a very negative effect on veterans with PTSD, animal owners, and individuals with developmental disabilities. I know this is something that the bill sponsors and supporters of House Bill 172 do not take lightly and that concerns over public safety are likely the reason fireworks discharge remains illegal in Ohio.

The Ohio Fireworks Safety Coalition has provided constructive input to make this bill safer for Ohioans including maintaining the statewide ban on discharge, but allowing for an opt-in for local communities. This approach honors local rule and gives localities the opportunity to consider the impact on law enforcement and fire safety resources that will be impacted with legal discharge. This input may have been considered, but is not included in HB 172. If the General Assembly truly feels that discharge should be allowed in Ohio, then I would strongly encourage you to look to those suggestions and to other states and consider limits and safeguards for HB 172.

In closing, I want to stress that, while our coalition remains opposed to fireworks discharge, we are committed to working with the bill sponsors and this committee to make this a pro-safety bill. If it is the position of the General Assembly to allow for consumer discharge in Ohio, we want to bring a constructive voice to the table.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.