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OHIO ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS



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Ohio Chapter

December 1st, 2020

The Honorable Larry Obhof
President, Ohio Senate
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear President Obhof—

On behalf of the organizations above, we are writing to strongly discourage passage of House Bill 253 during the final weeks of lame duck. Enactment of this legislation would be ill-advised and dangerous under normal circumstances, and Ohio is in a very abnormal situation right now.

With all of the challenges our state is facing, we are perplexed to see HB 253 moving after just two committee hearings in the Senate and with no dialogue among stakeholders. Certainly, there are more important issues for this chamber to discuss in the final days of the 133rd General Assembly. Bills to legalize fireworks discharge have continued to circulate in the legislature over the past few years. Proponents typically represent the fireworks industry while opponents represent a diverse coalition of healthcare providers, advocates for veterans, first responders, animal rights groups, and constituents who have been harmed by fireworks.

It is important to note that our coalition has not been approached to participate in any interested party meetings or discussions about possible changes to the bill. Further, many of the healthcare providers who oppose this legislation are unable to testify or participate in the process as they are currently seeing a surge of hospitalizations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unfair that these experts, who have dedicated their lives to caring for Ohio families and children, are not being given the opportunity to discuss this critical issue due to their work on the front lines of the pandemic. This effectively silences a significant number of constituents represented by the organizations above.

Fireworks are inherently dangerous and the current statewide prohibition on discharge conveys that message clearly. Individuals may choose to disobey the law, as they do with impaired or distracted driving; however, the General Assembly has an obligation to encourage our citizens to be safe and avoid actions that can harm others. Not only would passage of HB 253 send the dangerous signal that fireworks are safe, it would also demoralize frontline healthcare providers and hospitals who are looking for your support as they battle COVID-19. It has been shown that legalization of fireworks discharge will lead to more injuries, so it is confounding that we would take this step when our hospitals and healthcare providers are already spread thin.

We saw fireworks sales skyrocket this year due to the cancellation of large, public displays. As a result, injuries and property fires went up. We also saw fireworks increasingly used in protests. Again, passage of HB 253 will only encourage these actions and lead to more injuries and destruction. With a vaccine on the horizon, we can expect life to return to normal next summer and public fireworks displays to resume for Independence Day and other holidays. This is a far better way to celebrate freedom and promote safety than legalizing backyard discharge.

The General Assembly recently passed legislation impacting the state response to COVID-19 on the justification that lawmakers were listening to and representing their constituents. It is in this spirit that we encourage you to oppose HB 253. Your constituents are imploring you to keep fireworks discharge illegal in Ohio.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and dedication to the health and safety of all Ohioans.

Submitted on behalf of—

Ohio Children's Hospitals Association
Ohio Insurance Institute
Ohio State Medical Association
Ohio Osteopathic Association
Ohio Ophthalmological Society
Franklin County Dog Shelter and Adoption Center
Ohio Academy of Family Physicians
Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Emergency Physicians, Ohio Chapter
Prevent Blindness Ohio