

December 3, 2021 – via email transmission to Committee staff

Good Afternoon,

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am a wife to a veteran with PTSD to loud noises, a pet owner to multiple species of animals who all have extreme reactions to loud noises and I have been a Special Education Teacher for 25 years. These are my thoughts on fireworks.

Fireworks used to be special. They were community events usually following a town carnival to benefit a fire department. It was fun for the whole family and a great fundraiser for the fire company.

Fireworks are no longer special. They are violent, dangerous, destructive, and poisonous. They are terrifying and killing pets, livestock, and wildlife.

Please allow me to share my personal story with fireworks. I have had horses for 43 years and have never had to sedate them, for any reason, until 2018. Since the summer of 2018, I have had to sedate them for most of the summer, as fireworks have been unpredictable, loud and explosive. Now, the first boom on a random weeknight, sends me into a full frenzy running out to my barn to put them in the barn, give them meds and turn up the radio and barn fans. Some nights it is a few here and there, but some nights it resembles a war movie. It is frightening and now haunting me in my dreams even when I am asleep.

There are fireworks where I live, literally year-round. There are many stories online of horses having aneurisms, strokes, breaking legs, or becoming injured (or worse) running through fences. Some horses ran through fences somehow unharmed but then were hit by cars. I read a story of four horses who broke out of their fence and ended up in a highway. A local horseman saw the story, went out, rounded them up and returned them to their home. What a great American, community member and horseman, right? However, when he got back home to his own farm, he learned his own horses had escaped and were on the loose, as well. As of the time of reading that story, I am not sure if his horses had been found. Why would an otherwise docile and peaceful animal feel the need to run through fences to escape their fields? Fireworks have terrorized them. It is not natural to have the equivalent of cannons and warfare on any given night

Even sedated, my horses are frantic. If I can predict fireworks are happening, I can lock them in their stalls, which helps just a bit. The first year, 2017, I went in their stalls to try to calm them. In their frenzy, they reared and spun in frantic circles. In their panic, they threw me against multiple stall walls for almost fifteen minutes before I was able to crawl out. Now I stand outside their stall doors and watch them spin, rear and suffer. If I don't catch the horses before fireworks start, I am unable to safely do so. They bolt and gallop the length of the pasture. They have slammed their bodies into fences and walls. All I can do is watch it happen. And pray. It is only a matter of time before mine have an aneurism, breaks a leg or has a heart attack.

This situation is severely unfair to all livestock owners, veterans (and others) with PTSD (my husband), those trying to put small children to bed, those with special needs children, those with pets, and those whose hours require them to get up early in the mornings. I read a post online from a lady whose husband is a surgeon who gets up at 4 am each morning to go into the hospital. He now must sleep in their basement all summer long to escape the noise and life disruption of the constant fireworks.

In this time of climate change and weather becoming more severe than ever, we shouldn't be causing more unnecessary pollution. Fireworks are filled with dangerous chemicals. I read an article in scroll.in about the pollutants and poisonous chemicals (perchlorate was mentioned specifically). These pollutants end up in water sources and are undetectable without testing the water to determine that it is safe. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimated that up to 16 million people are drinking this contaminated water. These contaminants cause women to have thyroid dysfunction with high levels of perchlorate and low levels of iodine in their systems. Children born to these women have increased risk of neurodevelopment disease such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and low IQs.

There are thousands of people who feel the same way I do. This is evident by the news articles on all of the calls into police departments. The hate on all the town and community pages between the "it's our right to fire explosives into the sky" people and "the fireworks are causing stress and health issues to those with animals, PTSD, small children and special needs children" people are fighting each other constantly. The fights have also led to real life altercations in some cases. It is scary and very sad.

People could plan accordingly for scheduled shows, but this free-for-all is an entirely different story. I can't sedate my horses six months of the year because people choose to set off fireworks to celebrate a random Tuesday.

On a side note- when fireworks were illegal, there would be a handful of scattered fireworks throughout the week of July 4th. I believe that people set off a few and then stopped, perhaps for the fear of being caught. However, it was nothing like the horror that it is now.

According to the Fireworks Safety Council, "fireworks cause an estimated 18,500 fires each year, including 1,300 structure fires, 300 vehicle fires, and nearly 17,000 other fires.

The majority of these incidents were amateurs attempting to use professional grade, home-made or other fireworks or explosives."

With these facts, why are we allowing amateurs to do this?

I have read multiple articles (Dox5ny.com, citylimits.org, Syracuse.com) that adjacent states, specifically authorities in New Jersey and New York, are troubled with the sales of fireworks just across their borders in Pennsylvania, as that is where their residents are purchasing them. Our fireworks are causing issues in other states, as well.

Mayors in multiple cities can't keep up with the complaints and police calls that they are receiving regarding fireworks and the small fine for violating the regulations doesn't deter people. Some people reportedly laughed and said that they include the cost of the fine in their firework's "budget".

It has been reported that this is all about the tax money that fireworks are bringing in. However, it is costing money, as well. Philadelphia, York and Pittsburgh have set up special task force police units to deal with fireworks. When is the safety and mental and physical well-being of our residents worth looking into alternative ways to create state money? When is enough, enough?

Each night I pray for the world, my country, and my state. I pray for my loved ones. And every night I pray that fireworks have not burned down my barn or harmed my horses. I shouldn't have to do this. I'm so disappointed with our state right now and I have lived here, with horses, all of my life. This is life altering and unreasonable for those of us who are negatively impacted.

Pennsylvania has an opportunity to fix this. Pennsylvania Governor Arthur James declared victory in the war on fireworks in 1939. We need that to happen again. We need to repeal Act 43 of 2017.

Sincerely,

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