

December 10, 2021 – *via email transmission to Committee staff*

Dear Honorable Members of the House and Senate Agriculture:

Thank you for having this hearing today and giving the people a chance to comment on this very important issue of Act 43 and the experience my family had with regard to its passing.

On a gorgeous day in August of 2014, I was present for a raid on the property of a dogfighter in Kalamazoo Michigan. We departed for the property at 5am with high hopes of rescuing all of the dogs on the property and arresting the ringleader and owner of these little victims of the horrific bloodsport known as dogfighting. The FBI, ATF local PD entered the property first. Once secure animal control, humane officers and those of us representing the agency spearheading the raid can then go on and get the dogs. This particular day we rescued 56 adult dogs and one younger one, Crosby. The property had awful outside areas for each of the dogs and although this was summer, the dogs withstood the cold, brutal Michigan winters outside as well. The fight area was a garage, complete with blood splattered carpeting and blood splattered walls. There was all of the paraphernalia you would see at any location where dogs fight or are trained to fight. The owner was arrested and all the dogs were legally removed from the property. Fortunately The owner surrendered every dog. At the time I was employed by Humane Animal Rescue in Pittsburgh but frequently deployed with the Humane Society of the United States on dogfighting, hoarding and cases of weather disaster. I always sought permission to bring dogs back and this time was no different. I asked to bring four dogs back then quickly filled my car with eight. One of the dogs I brought back was this sweet puppy Crosby. He was the sole survivor of his litter. The rest were “culled or rolled” and didn’t have what the owner wanted in his fighting dogs and they were killed by most inhumane means like electrocution and drowning. Crosby became the little darling of the shelter. He was the sweetest little guy and most days wore a Pittsburgh Penguins shirt. He was adopted but sadly returned when his young energy was too much for the adopters. Enter my daughter who saw him online and told me she was coming to adopt him on her way home from moving out after graduating from college. She came directly from school in Baltimore to the shelter, picked him up and took him home for what she thought was going to be a long time together. Crosby had some issues with noises like thunderstorms but it never made him act aggressively. Thunderstorms give animals and people some kind of warning with changes in the barometric pressure, the wind, dogs can sense a difference in the air and know something is coming. Fireworks are like when someone takes two pots and bangs I’m behind you without your knowledge of them sneaking up on you. We all know how startling that is. Keep in mind dogs sense of hearing is much more keen than ours, everything is louder. Imagine that over and over and over again. Fast forward to 2017 when our state passed legislation which permitted the sale of what were once prohibited pyrotechnics. A 12% tax in addition to the state sales tax gave the state a new revenue stream, or did it? On July 4, 2018 the city of Pittsburgh police had 158 calls about fireworks. There were very few citations issued as the police were just not capable of responding to all of the calls

without jeopardizing human lives when it came to the other calls they were getting. The city paid overtime to keep up. Overtime costs a lot of money for a rather large city police department. Pittsburgh was like a war zone that night. It was non-stop all day and night. My daughter and son-in-law had a terrible night that night with Crosby even though a veterinarian had prescribed strong drugs to help Crosby get through. The weeks leading up to this date had nonstop fireworks. On this night, Crosby could not take the noise of the fireworks any longer and redirected on my son in law biting through his jeans and doing major damage to his leg. My daughter and son-in-law were so afraid of him at that moment they put him in the car and drove around western Pennsylvania until 5 o'clock in the morning when their pure exhaustion made them go home. Fortunately I have many friends in the veterinary world and one of them was able to come and euthanize Crosby that morning and we all said goodbye to this sweet 7 year old survivor of the cruel bloodsport that is dogfighting. Crosby was the sweetest dog in the world and would never hurt anyone and never showed any kind of aggression towards humans or other animals. Until there were fireworks. My daughter still cannot listen to fireworks, the pain of losing her sweet dog to them it's too deep. My son-in-law's leg it's fine now but the scars on his leg are not nearly as deep as the scars on his heart.

I know that our state is in need of revenue and this is one way that we found a way to increase revenue, but there has got to be a better way than putting the public, firefighters, veterans, adults and our children at risk. The restrictions pertaining to fireworks are completely unenforceable, and now that we have less police due to progressive cries to defund them leaving our cities paying more overtime and not being able to respond to calls like fireworks complaints. More of these calls are going to go on answered and there will be more injuries to children and adults, more fires, more dogs running at large, more veteran suicide and more heartache. According to the National Fire Protection Association 36% of injuries from fireworks are to children under the age of 15. How could we forget the fire in York PA last year where a young child was killed due to a fire that started from fireworks from a neighbor's house? That mother had to stand there and watch that house burn knowing her precious child was inside and there was nothing that could be done to save him. A firefighter had to carry out that little dead body, imagine his thoughts. . In a PennLive article a fire chief stated but if there's any money it's going to be given to fire departments from this fireworks tax he does not want it and called it "blood money." Jay Delaney, president of the Pennsylvania Career Fire Chiefs Association stated "the fireworks expansion is putting an increased burden on fire departments that are already stretched too thin." Lebanon PA fire chief Duane Trautman stated "the indiscriminate, inconsiderate and really reckless use of fireworks in Lebanon and elsewhere, I know that York had a house fire, it's disgusting. And this is all because of the state legislature and this fireworks law and their greedy little fingers in an 18% tax on the fireworks and these aerial fireworks."

If this legislation caused fire companies to be stretched too thin, police departments to not be able to respond to complaints about fireworks or they have to weigh which call they respond to.

What truly is the net gain financially? Is this really bringing in revenue after all of the extra cost has to be put into enforcing the limitations that are surrounding the law?

Please listen to the people of Pennsylvania. When fire chiefs, paramedics, emergency room physicians, veterans associations, pet owners are crying out for this to stop why are you not listening? All of those groups lobbied against the standalone bill and then it was back doored when no one was watching. Please PA legislature, do the right thing. I know my situation could've been a lot worse, I didn't lose a child like the mother in York.

Let's go back to what John Adams asked for. Every July 4th we celebrate our independence with lights in the sky.

Thank you for reading.

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Association of Professional Dog Trainers
Bureau of Dog Law Advisory Board
Member, Treasurer Weinstein's Animal Abuse Relief Fund
Member, FBI Dogfighting Task Force

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