

Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees

Testimony on Fireworks Law

Harrisburg, PA

Pennsylvania State Grange

December 15, 2021

Wayne Campbell
President
Pennsylvania State Grange
717-275-5045
president@pagrange.org

Senator Vogel, Senator Schwank, Representative Moul, Representative Pashinski, and members of the Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees, thank you very much for having the Pennsylvania State Grange testify. We are happy to see the General Assembly focusing on this important issue.

The Pennsylvania State Grange has represented rural Pennsylvanians, both farmers and rural communities, since 1873. As an advocacy organization, we respond to what our members feel is important to them. There has been a growing sentiment from Grange families that the Fireworks Law (Act 43 of 2017, House Bill 542) went too far in allowing an almost Wild West consumer fireworks environment on certain occasions during the year.

Many of our Grange members are veterans who have honorably served our country during combat missions. Being surrounded by fireworks displays throughout the summer months and having the size of the firework and its "explosion" strength are becoming increasingly traumatic for these veterans. The displays are not limited to just holidays but rather happening whenever anyone has something to celebrate. While they occur during the main summer holidays of Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day, they tend to occur every evening for a week and up to a month surrounding the actual holiday. These prolonged periods of dealing with "explosions" has an extremely adverse effect on many veterans' mental health.

In addition, prolonged periods of fireworks can have adverse effects agriculture interests. Sudden flashes of lights and explosions can spook livestock that can lead to serious injuries as well as scaring pets. We hear of animals that ran off at the sound of fireworks or hear of families who cannot console their animals during prolonged periods of explosions. The referenced article below states that dairy milk production may decline as well as their health when animals are exposed to loud noises.

<https://www.dairyglobal.net/health-and-nutrition/health/effects-of-noise-on-cattle-performance/>

Largely unlimited use of fireworks during dry conditions can also cause devastating fires destroying homes, crops and possible woodlands. For all of these reasons, the Pennsylvania State Grange has concerns on the existing Fireworks Law.

Having stated all that, we recognize that simply repealing the changes made in the Fireworks Law which expanded the legal range of fireworks as is often suggested is not an easy task and not one that we are advocating for.

How would Pennsylvania make up for the lost tax revenue it is receiving from expanded fireworks sales if the law were repealed? Current law requires a \$3,000 licensing registration fee for a pop-up parking lot firework stand for seasonal operation and up to a \$20,000 licensing fee annually for brick and mortar locations (Section 2408). In addition, there are excise taxes of 12-percent on the actual sales (Section 2412). Although these revenues go into the General Fund, some goes to dedicated funds. Two million dollars of this tax is dedicated annually to three programs, the Emergency Medical Services Grant Program, and the Online Training Educator and Training Reimbursement Accounts which are used to train volunteer firefighters in this Commonwealth (Section 2413). Where would the replacement money come from for these specific purposes if the law were repealed?

Source:

https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Business_Industry/fireworks/Documents/New%20Fireworks%20Law%20-%20Effective%20October%2030%202017.pdf.

A few suggestions the Pennsylvania State Grange believes would help alleviate concerns:

- Limiting days on which personal use of fireworks can take place.
- Amending the law prohibiting firework usage near hospitals, nursing homes or in areas with dense housing.
 - Amending the law to make it illegal to set off fireworks within 1000 feet of a farm animal operation without written consent of the farm operator.

The Pennsylvania State Grange also suggests that research done by either the Joint State Government Commission or the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. Findings will better equip the General Assembly with a solution that is more feasible and enforceable.

The Pennsylvania State Grange appreciates the attention given to fireworks use by the Senate and House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees. We hope that legislators will be able to use this research to craft an alternative to the present situation. And again, thank you for affording us the opportunity to testify.