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DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Ka 'Oihana Ho'okō Kānāwai

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TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 227
RELATING TO FIREWORKS
Before the Senate Committee on
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
Wednesday, February 5, 2025, 3:15 PM
State Capitol Conference Room 225, & Videoconference

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Wakai and members of the Committee:

The Department of Law Enforcement (DLE) strongly supports Senate Bill 227. This bill establishes the Illegal Fireworks Enforcement Division within the Department of Law Enforcement and provides crucial funding through June 30, 2028. This represents a significant step forward in institutionalizing and strengthening the State's efforts to combat illegal fireworks.

The creation of this division would allow for more coordinated and sustained enforcement efforts using specially trained and dedicated personnel focused specifically on illegal fireworks interdiction and investigation. This permanent structure would enhance the DLE's ability to protect our communities from the dangers of illegal fireworks through year-round enforcement and prevention efforts.

Based on our experience with the Task Force operations, establishing a permanent division is both timely and necessary to maintain the momentum in our fight against illegal fireworks in Hawaii. The sunset date of June 30, 2028, provides an appropriate period to assess the division's effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments to the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this bill.



Hawaii Representatives & Senators:

On behalf of the Libertarian Party of Hawaii, I am writing to express our strong opposition to any prohibitions and enforcement measures targeting fireworks. We believe Hawaiians have the right to pursue and engage in any activities that bring them joy and fulfillment.

Fireworks prohibitions and regulations infringe upon the freedom of our citizens to partake in this time-honored custom, diminishing the spirit of celebration and unity that fireworks bring.

Implementing strict enforcement measures to crack down on fireworks usage would only serve to burden law enforcement resources, and divert needed attention away from more pressing issues. Prohibitions and heavy enforcement will lead to unnecessary conflict between police and citizens, eroding trust and creating an atmosphere of fear and animosity. Causing harm against another person is already illegal, and crimes can already be prosecuted without these new tyrannical enforcement measures.

The Libertarian Party of Hawaii stands firm in our support of individual freedom and opposes any measures that encroach upon our citizens' rights.

In Freedom,

Abbra Green

Executive Secretary, Libertarian Party of Hawaii

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SB-227

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 11:31:49 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/5/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beverly Heiser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Elefante, Vice Chair Wakai, and Committee Members,

I STRONGLY SUPPORT SB227 that establishes the Illegal Fireworks Enforcement Division within the Department of Law Enforcement and appropriates funds.

Establishing an Illegal Fireworks Enforcement Division will provide the **full-time dedication** needed to slow the flow of Illegal Fireworks entering the state. This type of enforcement is needed, due to illegal fireworks being so out of control and the extensive involvement of the black market.

Act 67 established the Illegal Fireworks Task Force (IFTF) under the Department of Law Enforcement (DLE) on June 7, 2023. The IFTF has made the most progress thus far, to interrupt the supply chain and distribution that led to some areas on Oahu noting a slight reduction of illegal fireworks in 2023. This effort has accomplished more than any other initiative to reduce illegal fireworks use, and has resulted in ongoing criminal investigations, two felony indictments, and covert operations that resulted in twenty criminal citations.

The amount seized at the docks from December 2023 to January 2024 indicates a strong need for this type of effort to continue. The report to the 2025 legislature submitted by Jordan Lowe stated that “any earnest effort to counter illegal fireworks can only be done with a dedicated criminal investigative unit with sustained staffing and funding”. The current IFTF uses State Narcotics investigators who participate only part-time due to having other duties. The report further stated fireworks are smuggled into Hawaii year-round via “shipping, air transport, and mail channels”. It confirms that there is a “flourishing fireworks black market” with “well-established networks and organizations” and a “well-established underground of people” who use illegal fireworks regularly.

The Aliamanu tragedy was sad, and it is hopeful that the lives lost and those suffering from life-changing critical injuries were not in vain but will provide the wake-up call to take the use of illegal fireworks seriously. This all starts with legislators creating laws to invoke stiffer penalties and higher fines, and allows for enforcement to the fullest extent of the law to instill a fear of getting caught and induce deterrence. This may require more appropriations committed this year to be effective, but how do you put a price on lives lost, life-changing deformities, and psychological issues that may require medical attention for the rest of one's life? Yes, enough is enough.

Please provide your full support for SB227. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-227

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 2:49:46 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/5/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victor K. Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY support this proposal.

SB-227

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:32:23 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/5/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alan Urasaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of this measure and urge the committee to adopt this measure.

Mahalo.

SB-227

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 10:38:27 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/5/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bronson Teixeira	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in strong opposition to this bill, it's a waste of tax payer dollars and will not stop illegal fireworks.

SB-227

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:47:43 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/5/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicholas Zehr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **strong OPPOSITION** to this bill, which seeks to expand the government’s enforcement apparatus to crack down on illegal fireworks. While concerns about safety and public disturbances are understandable, this legislation represents a **wasteful expansion of state power**, further **eroding individual liberties**, and **misallocating taxpayer dollars** to a problem that is best addressed through community-driven solutions, not increased law enforcement.

1. Government Overreach and Expansion of Law Enforcement

This bill creates yet another **bureaucratic division within the Department of Law Enforcement**, complete with new taxpayer-funded salaries, equipment, and enforcement powers. Instead of focusing on violent crime and real public safety concerns, this measure would divert law enforcement resources to policing what is essentially a victimless crime. Increasing the surveillance and enforcement state for something as culturally significant as fireworks is **a gross overreach of government power**.

Hawaii already has some of the strictest fireworks regulations in the nation, yet the illegal market persists. Expanding enforcement has **historically failed** to eliminate the use of illegal fireworks, and this bill would only lead to further government intrusion into people’s private lives, wasting time and money in the process.

2. A Misuse of Taxpayer Dollars

This legislation proposes an **unknown but significant appropriation** of taxpayer money for new government jobs and operations, yet there is no clear **cost-benefit analysis** to justify this expenditure. At a time when Hawaii faces economic struggles, high cost of living, and a housing crisis, should we really be spending **millions** on policing fireworks?

This funding would be better spent on **essential services**—such as addressing homelessness, improving infrastructure, and supporting small businesses—rather than expanding the surveillance state to target individuals for celebrating with fireworks.

3. Prohibition Creates Black Markets and Criminalizes Ordinary People

History has shown that **prohibition does not eliminate demand**—it only **pushes activity underground** and creates **more dangerous conditions**. Just as alcohol prohibition led to bootlegging and the War on Drugs fueled the rise of illicit markets, banning or cracking down on fireworks will **not stop their use**—it will only make law-abiding people into criminals while empowering **illegal distributors** to profit.

Rather than using **heavy-handed enforcement**, a better approach would be **loosening restrictions on legal fireworks**, allowing regulated sales, and focusing on community education. Over-regulation has created the very black market this bill now seeks to expand government to fight against.

4. Cultural and Personal Freedoms Matter

Fireworks are a deeply ingrained part of Hawaii's **cultural and community traditions**, particularly around New Year's and other celebrations. Instead of embracing a **nanny-state approach**, policymakers should **respect individual freedom** and acknowledge that not every risk in life should be managed through state intervention.

Many residents responsibly enjoy fireworks **without causing harm to others**. A truly free society should not criminalize peaceful activities just because some individuals misuse them. **The government's role should be to protect life and property, not to dictate personal behavior through excessive regulation and enforcement.**

This bill is an unnecessary expansion of **government power**, a **wasteful use of taxpayer money**, and an **ineffective approach** to a long-standing issue. Instead of increasing the policing and criminalization of fireworks, we should explore **less intrusive solutions**, such as deregulating the legal market, improving education, and fostering community-led initiatives for responsible fireworks use.

For these reasons, I strongly urge this committee to **reject this bill**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Nicholas Zehr