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***Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of
LD 1307, An Act To Restrict the Sale, Purchase and Use of Fireworks in the State
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety***

Good morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. I am Kristen Cloutier and I am proud to represent House District 60, part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am here today to present **LD 1307, An Act To Restrict the Sale, Purchase and Use of Fireworks in the State.**

As a former municipal official in Lewiston and now as a State Representative, one of the complaints I have received most often from my constituents is about fireworks; and that's in a municipality that already prohibits them. My constituents have described in detail the safety issues, trauma, and nuisance caused by fireworks to their families and property, those suffering from PTSD and other mental health issues, and their pets. In addition, the State's stance on consumer fireworks has left municipalities to create and implement their own ordinances which are largely unenforceable and unmanageable by our already overburdened public safety personnel, whose response costs real taxpayer dollars. What we have is a patchwork system that changes from town to town and is impossible to keep track of. I have yet to meet a person working in public safety who enjoys responding to complaints about fireworks. In fact, in Lewiston alone since 2007 (when fireworks were made legal within the state), police response to fireworks violations have **TRIPLED**. While law enforcement has never wanted to respond to these complaints, having to do so **THREE TIMES MORE OFTEN** is an excessive waste of public service time and resources.

While individual town ordinances are available online, they differ from town to town, hence the patchwork approach to ordinances that I mentioned earlier. In addition, not everyone has internet access, as we have become acutely more aware of during this pandemic; and it is highly unlikely (and I would say unreasonable) to expect people to visit town offices to ascertain this information, given that tourists (and state residents as well) travel through multiple towns when they visit the state in the summer.

Clearly something isn't working. This is further evidenced by the fact that legislation has been introduced to restrict consumer fireworks in some way or another since they were made legal.

Our jobs as state representatives is to represent the constituents in our districts. In that regard, I share this short excerpt from an email sent by a constituent who couldn't be with us today, which I believe paints a very vivid picture of the situation we have created:

“I've been reporting fireworks violations for the past three years - the latest was just now, and another one at dinnertime - and this year is the worst one yet. I've yet to meet anyone who feels this law is a good idea, or enjoys hearing fireworks going off randomly and in locations where it's supposed to be illegal. The citizens are not being well served, and public safety officers certainly have better things to do than chase down errant fireworks violators.

It is especially disturbing that those of us who never wished to be at the mercy of unexpected loud explosions, nor see our animals frightened to the point of behavioral changes, had no say in the passage of this short-sighted legislation.

Since the sale of fireworks became legal, summer in Lewiston has taken on a sense of being on edge every night. It doesn't matter what time of night or day, or what day it is, I can expect to hear what sounds like mortars as late as 1 or 2am. I've made countless calls to 911 in the past and expect to do the same this summer. In fact, loud explosions are going on as I write, in a zone and at a time that's supposed to be fireworks-free. Why must we have our quality of life diminished because some think it's fun to blow things up?

Summer in Maine used to be a time of long-awaited pleasure and ease. No longer.”

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.