



**Testimony regarding HB 6955 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE AND TRADE OF IVORY AND RHINOCEROS HORN.** Environment Committee, March 11, 2015

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My sincerest thanks go to the Environment Committee for raising this important piece of legislation and holding a public hearing.

This session, Connecticut has an opportunity to save elephants and rhinos, which are being driven to extinction. Tens of thousands of elephants are brutally slaughtered each year by poachers, with proceeds often directly funding terrorist groups.<sup>1</sup> These gentle, majestic animals may live across the Atlantic on a far-away continent - but American consumers have easily overcome this barrier.

In a recent New York Times article, Daniel M. Ashe, director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, underscored Americans' role in the plummeting populations of these endangered species. He said, "The ongoing slaughter of rhinos and elephants in Africa is driven by rising consumer demand here, and United States citizens are intimately involved in illegal trade both here and abroad."<sup>2</sup>

President Obama has called this poaching problem an "international crisis" and federal agencies have recognized that the most powerful way to halt the killing is to "take the profit out of this illegal trade with all the tools at our disposal."<sup>3</sup>

In 2014, both New York and New Jersey responded to this crisis situation by enacting laws to prohibit the sale of ivory and rhino horn. Given Connecticut's proximity to these states, it will be all too easy for traffickers to simply move their transactions across state borders. Connecticut has a responsibility to act now by closing down our market for poached ivory and rhino horn.

Unfortunately, one of the challenges in stopping the flow of poached ivory is that it is relatively simple to tint new ivory so that it looks antique. Even for experts, it can be very difficult to distinguish old from new ivory. This is why we are asking for a near complete ban on the sale of ivory.

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, "Elephant poaching, environmental crime fund African terror groups." *CBC News* June 26, 2014. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/elephant-poaching-environmental-crime-fund-african-terror-groups-1.2688949>

<sup>2</sup> Nixon, Ron. "Obama Administration Plans to Aggressively Target Wildlife Trafficking." *New York Times* Feb 12, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/12/us/politics/obama-administration-to-target-illegal-wildlife-trafficking.html?emc=eta1& r=1>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The language of this bill as drafted represents a ban on all sales of ivory – it is essentially the law New Jersey passed last year. However, Connecticut Votes for Animals is open to considering exemptions for certain antiques, as long as those exemptions are consistent with other states – otherwise enforcement becomes difficult and we may establish a pattern of diminishing returns.

As stated above, it can be very difficult to distinguish old from new ivory, but New York state may have struck a reasonable compromise, in that they will allow the sale of an antique that is 1) over 100 years old AND 2) comprised of less than 20% ivory. They also allow the sale of musical instruments, i.e. pianos, manufactured before 1965.

I also want to point out that the current bill language offers a number of allowances that serve the interests of Connecticut residents and historians, such as:

1. The transfer of ownership of ivory products through inheritance
2. The purchase of ivory by a university or hospital for educational purposes, and I might add “historical research organizations,” (museums, for example) to that list. (Section 1b)
3. The import and possession of ivory into the state by trophy hunters who have killed elephants on canned hunts in Africa. There is already a federal exemption for this situation.

Again, I want to thank you for raising this bill, and I ask that you please favorably report the bill out of committee. The elephant and rhino poaching crisis has reached a magnitude that demands action on our part, and the best action is to stop the sale of ivory and rhino horn in Connecticut.

Thank you,  
Amy Harrell