

Testimony Concerning HB 6955:

a bill to ban the sale of elephant ivory and rhino horn in Connecticut

Environment Committee

March 11, 2015

I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of HB 6955: a bill to ban the sale of elephant ivory and rhino horn in Connecticut.

My name is Jamila HadjSalem, and I am a resident of Connecticut, as well as a supporter of local animal groups.

Please ban the sale, purchase, barter, trade and intra-state transport of ivory and rhino horn. Every day, close to a hundred elephants are killed for their tusks. The Western black rhino became extinct due to poaching for their horns, and many more rhino species are in danger of extinction for the same reason (one rhino is killed every eight hours for their horns, according to the South African Department of Environmental Affairs). Seeing baby elephants crying by the side of their mother's dead bodies is heart-wrenching, and it's all for ivory. Hundreds of thousands of elephants are in danger, of losing their families, their lives, and their species, by illegal poaching. These heinous individuals will not stop killing elephants and rhinos unless there is no profit in it for them anymore. Connecticut has a duty to help stop the sale of ivory and horns, due to the fact that Connecticut has such a dense population and oceanic ports, that make it easy for illegal traffickers to use our state to import and sell these grotesquely gotten items. The Wildlife Conservation Society holds that Connecticut is one of six key states needed to ban the sale of ivory and horns to put a dent in the traffickers market. With our unusual position to help stop one of the most disgusting practices, we should take advantage of it, and do what we can to help save the remaining elephants and rhinos before it's too late. New York and New Jersey have already done it, and California is talking about it.

While the federal government has placed a ban selling new ivory, there is virtually no way to distinguish the new ivory from the old. Traffickers just posit that their "new" ivory *is* "old," and this allows for the black market to continue to thrive and flourish, despite the federal ban. We need harsher laws regarding ivory and horns, to close this loophole, and keep these products out of our country, as best we can. If Connecticut does nothing, we are as guilty as the poachers and buyers-- by allowing this to happen, we are just as complicit. The ivory trade grossed approximately one billion dollars over the last decade, and eighty percent of the ivory was obtained through illegal (ie. poaching) methods. This is a crisis for the elephants and rhinos, as prices for ivory have tripled in China over the last five years. While we can't control what China does, we do have control over Connecticut, and keeping in mind that the U.S. is second to China in the global ivory market, our state can make a huge difference in bringing down this trade, if we ban the sale of ivory.

Beyond banning the sale of ivory and horns, also impose stricter penalties on those who do get caught selling ivory and horns. By increasing the penalties and fines levied against those who would continue this trade, we make it even less profitable for them to continue, and hopefully, with the double whammy of increased penalties and the illegality of selling ivory, Connecticut can be a forerunner in the downfall of a trade that should have died decades ago.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Jamila HadjSalem  
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