

Testimony Submitted to the Environment Committee:
H.B. No. 6955: An Act Prohibiting The Sale And Trade Of Ivory And Rhinoceros Horn.

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban, and Members of the Governance Committee,

As the Executive Director of the Connecticut Historical Society, and on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about this bill. The CHS sympathizes with and supports stopping the poaching of endangered animals. This is a horrific act that should not be tolerated by any government or nation.

That said we are concerned about the broad language used in this bill. In particular, Section 1, Part B. As written, this section will no longer allow the hundreds of historical organizations in Connecticut to continue to document our history.

Connecticut has a historical connection with the ivory trade. In the 1700s lasting through World War II the Village of Ivoryton and other areas in the lower Connecticut River Valley held a monopoly on the importation and manufacture of ivory products in the United States. This industry led to the exploitation of the African Bush Elephant and enslavement of thousands of humans. Our history reveals the negative outcomes of the ivory trade and how consumer demand for "exotic" materials can lead to the endangerment of a species.

This history, its documentation and interpretation, provides powerful lessons about how the actions of individuals can lead to environmental disaster. But without the actual physical evidence of these past actions – made real through the display and use of Connecticut's historic objects, many of which contain ivory – these lessons become legend and hearsay. At the CHS we use items such as combs, piano keys, and figurines made with and of ivory to help tens of thousands of school children understand the global impact of their actions, and to make better decisions today. We do this through programs and exhibitions like *Connecticut: 50 Objects/50 Stories* which documents the stories that define us as a people, place and idea. In this exhibit, an ivory comb manufactured in Ivoryton will represent the good and bad consequences of Connecticut's transatlantic trade.

We propose that the antiques be exempted from this bill. Despite claims otherwise it is absolutely possible to prove beyond reasonable doubt that material used in the antique was not acquired through illegal poaching. We do this by researching the provenance and origins of the objects in our collections; research that is guided by professional standards and is followed stringently by museums and cultural organizations. Further, we propose to

add historical organizations – museums, archives and research centers – as exempted institutions at the end of Section 1, Part B. These organizations share the educational purpose with universities and hospitals.

To close, illegal poaching should be stopped, but not at the cost of historical amnesia. It is through our history, the documenting and sharing of our stories, that we learn how our current situation has come to be. By allowing us to continue the important work of history we can stop today's poaching from becoming tomorrow's antiques.

We look forward to working with this committee and this issue's other stakeholders to find a reasonable middle ground that, using our history as example, will prevent further needless destruction.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jody".

Jody Blankenship
Executive Director, Connecticut Historical Society