

March 14, 2015

Written Testimony In Opposition to HB 6955 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE AND TRADE OF IVORY AND RHINOCEROS HORN

While I am concerned about the poaching that this bill is designed to help eliminate, and the need to protect the declining numbers of elephant and other species, I must point out at least one problem with this bill as written, and express why I am against the current, excessively-broad wording.

As a piano technician with over sixteen years of experience in the Naugatuck Valley and other southwest portions of Connecticut, I am very disturbed by the compliance hardship this bill will needlessly cause for many piano owners in the state, as well as the hundreds of piano technicians such as myself. If this bill is allowed to pass, in my opinion it should only be with wording added to exempt pianos and other musical instruments, and without adding any new documentation or licensing requirements to the exempted industries.

In my experience servicing over 1,800 pianos in sixteen years, almost one in ten pianos contains a small amount of ivory used as the covering for the white keys. The ivory is in the form of a thin veneer over the keys' wood core. Virtually all pianos with ivory key tops were manufactured prior to 1950, and most even before 1930, well before any ban on ivory was imposed. In the last 60 to 90 years, almost all pianos manufactured have used plastic for the covering on the white keys.

As written, HB 6955 would require piano owners and struggling piano dealerships to spend hundreds of dollars to remove vintage ivory from their instruments and replace it with plastic in order to legally offer pianos for sale in Connecticut. In some cases this original decades-old ivory is in very good condition and would not ordinarily be replaced. Many old pianos have significant monetary or sometimes even sentimental value, and the proposed ban would not allow a technician to make small repairs to the key tops while preserving the historical integrity of the piano. Replacing all the ivory with plastic on some old instruments reduces their value as vintage pianos, and on others may not be a job the piano owner can afford to pay for simply to legally sell their older piano to a young family whose children wish to begin piano lessons.

As written, the bill would make it impossible for piano technicians to offer affordable, legal repair options to customers who own a piano with ivory keys. Occasionally old ivory key tops from other piano keys made prior to 1930 are used to replace individual missing ivory pieces on a customer's piano. These repairs cost only a small fraction of the price of a full replacement with plastic, and they preserve the vintage character and design of the pianos in question. Such repairs may be rare, but they are extremely important to the piano owners affected, many of whom do not have the discretionary funds available for a wholesale replacement of their white key tops simply to comply with a new regulation.

I would urge you to oppose the wording of this bill as presented. I do not see any advantage to including pianos in an ivory ban such as this. Will banning the sale of decades-old pianos with legally-obtained ivory help to stop the poaching of endangered species today? I appeal to you and everyone involved to carefully investigate the adverse impact HB 6955 will have on struggling industries such as the piano industry, with little or no impact in stopping the poaching abroad.

Reference – Piano Technicians Guild statement on proposed ivory regulations:

http://www.ptg.org/scripts/4disapi.dll/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS_Document&DocID=608&MenuKey=Menu27