



**NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION
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Date: March 11, 2016

To: Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Environment

From: Christopher Kopacki, Ph.D., Connecticut State Liaison, NRA-ILA

RE: HB 5578, An Act Prohibiting the Sale and Trade of Ivory – OPPOSE

On behalf of the National Rifle Association of America, I would like to express our opposition to House Bill 5578, which would prohibit a person in Connecticut from selling or trading ivory and rhinoceros horns. This bill would do nothing to promote its purported goal of protecting elephants, rhinoceroses, and other species from illegal activity in Africa, while it would impose a heavy burden on law-abiding citizens here in the United States.

Illegal trade in wildlife, as well as poaching for meat and products such as horns and tusks, takes its toll on the health and viability of wildlife populations. Further, it undermines the tremendous sustainability achievements made possible by hunters and other wildlife conservationists in the United States and other parts of the world. The NRA applauds serious efforts to stop poaching and the illegal ivory trade, but HB 5578 would not materially contribute to that goal.

This bill would, however, harm those who have no part in illegal activities; firearm owners, sportsmen, hunters, recreational shooters and gun collectors who have legally purchased or acquired firearms (as well as knives, jewelry, antiques and other items) that have incorporated ivory for decades. These include some of America's most historically-significant and collectible guns. Historically, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintained the position that most ivory in the U.S. has been legally imported and that its sale in the U.S. did not materially contribute to the illegal ivory trade. Nevertheless, under HB 5578, the purchase, sale, offer to sell, or possession with intent to sell legally-owned ivory would turn everyday citizens of Connecticut into criminals.

Although this bill contains limited exceptions, it does not adequately protect individuals who legally acquired items containing ivory. Private individuals typically do not have documentation for legal items—musical instruments containing ivory, for example—which never required a paper trail before. Further, by randomly setting a limit on the volume of ivory incorporated in a gun, knife or musical instrument, it would impose arbitrary distinctions on people who had acted similarly under former interpretations of the law.

The NRA is opposed to HB 5578 because, if implemented, it would amount to the taking of property that had been acquired legally and in good faith. Needless to say, property that cannot be sold is radically diminished in value.

While the NRA stands in opposition to the illegal ivory trade and poaching, banning the trade and sale of legally-owned, pre-ban ivory will not save one elephant (much less mammoths, ivory from which is covered in the bill, even though the creatures themselves are long extinct). The NRA is receptive to measures that directly target the illegal ivory trade and poaching. We do not, however, support symbolic measures that do little more than demonize law-abiding citizens and deprive them of the value of property that was originally obtained legally and in good faith.

Connecticut sportsmen, collectors, hunters and NRA members urge you to vote in opposition to HB 5578. Please feel free to contact me at 703-267-1192 if you have additional questions or concerns. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher G. Kopacki, Ph.D.
Connecticut State Liaison
National Rifle Association