

Testimony Submitted to the Committee on Environment

***Testimony of Ilene Frank
Chief Curator
Connecticut Historical Society:***

HB 5578: 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 Chief Curator 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.

We also wish to thank the Committee for continuing its work from last year that acknowledges the need for an exemption for museums. 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 human beings. 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 the recent *Connecticut: 50 Objects/50 Stories* exhibit which documented the stories that define us as a people, place and idea. In this exhibit, an ivory comb manufactured in Ivoryton represented the good and bad consequences of Connecticut's transatlantic trade.

There are times when museums and historical societies wish to acquire items that are wholly composed of ivory, such as the scrimshaw examples we have in the CHS collection. These historic items are representative of mercantile trade, manufacturing, and art but they are also valuable teaching tools for explaining how our beliefs change about what is an acceptable raw material for finished goods. These artifacts are used to inspire our visitors to contemplate how complicated our history can be. It is for this reason the CHS has concern over the language in the proposed legislation regarding the exemption of antiques where the total volume of the ivory component is less than twenty per cent and/or the manufactured item is not made wholly or primarily of ivory. This proposed restriction will negatively affect the ability of antique dealers to acquire and sell to the CHS historic artifacts where ivory composes more than 20% of the artifact's total volume.

In addition, we have concerns regarding "the owner or seller provides historical documentation demonstrating provenance that verifies: (i) If the item is a musical instrument that contains elephant ivory, that such instrument was manufactured prior to January 1, 1976; or (ii) If the item is an antique, that it is not less than one hundred years old." It is a rare occurrence that an antique comes to market with historic documentation of proof of manufacture or purchase. Instead, it is much more common that antiques come to market with a contemporary attribution to their authenticity. Asking for a historic piece of paper to accompany the historic artifact places an unfair burden on sellers and providers. Instead, the CHS looks to work with the committee on new language that would identify appropriate contemporary experts, for instance the expertise of antiques professionals or curators, that can accurately identify and certify that a piece of ivory is antique and that this documentation would then allow for any selling or trading of the artifact. It is possible to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the material used in the artifact in question is historic. 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.

To close, illegal poaching should be stopped. 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 welcome the opportunity to work with you to help craft legislation that ensures the Connecticut Historical Society and other heritage organizations will be able to carry out our mission of connecting you and the story of Connecticut.

Thank you,

Ilene Frank
Chief Curator, Connecticut Historical Society