



**NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA  
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**Date: March 3, 2016**

**To: Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Environment**

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

**RE: SB 227, An Act Concerning Cecil's Law – Oppose**

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On behalf of the National Rifle Association of America, I would like to express our opposition to SB 227, which would prohibit a person in Connecticut from importing, possessing, selling, offering for sale, or transporting any part of an African elephant, African lion, African leopard, black rhinoceros and white rhinoceros. This bill would do nothing to promote its purported goal of protecting these 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 SB 227 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 animal products 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 SB 227, the importation, possession, sale, offer to sell or transportation of these legal products would turn everyday citizens of Connecticut into felons.

Furthermore, SB 227 wrongfully targets American hunters and undermines the sustainable use of wildlife resources through regulated hunting, conservation efforts funded by sportsmen and the legal possession of wildlife under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). If this anti-hunting ban is enacted, such an attack on sportsmen would have a deleterious impact on these African game species and the African

people by restricting hunters who are willing to invest in the opportunity to legally hunt and conserve wildlife in the future.

Regulated hunting in Africa provides unmatched financial incentives for landowners and communities to protect wildlife from poachers by aiding in the cost of employing game patrols and providing value to the animals for locals. In Zimbabwe and Tanzania, hunting clients generate 30 and 14 times the revenue generated by photo tourism clients, respectively. The future of these wildlife species cannot rely on non-consumptive tourism alone. Local communities are not only terrorized by poachers, but by some big game. These big game species trample and destroy crops, as well as kill and injure people every year. For these reasons, controlling wildlife populations through regulated hunting is critical.

While this bill contains limited exceptions, it does not adequately address how a legal owner of these animal products might prove to the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection that they are in fact the legal owner and that they possessed the item prior to the ban. Private individuals typically do not have documentation for legal items—musical instruments containing ivory, for example—which never required a paper trail before. The NRA is opposed to SB 227 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 opposes poaching and the trade in illegal animal products, the effects of a ban on legally-owned animal products are disastrous for American hunters, gun owners, and collectors. Banning the trade and sale of legally owned, pre-ban ivory will not save one elephant, and a prohibition on the importation, possession and transportation of future hunting trophies in Connecticut only strips valuable resources from African communities trying to protect the listed species. 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 move the goalposts for 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 SB 227. 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