

House Committee on Fish, Wildlife, and Water Resources.
April 12, 2015

Chairman David Deen and Committee Members:

I am submitting this letter in response to the two days of testimony last week for bill H.297. I had not asked to speak but attended both days and had submitted a letter of testimony before Wednesday. I would like to follow that letter with several clarifications that I believe need to be made to the testimonies.

I am a pianist. I have played for fifty years. I have degrees in Music Education and Performance. I spent several years studying with a well known music historian and harpsichordist from Columbia University. I have experience with many types of early keyboard instruments and the communities of musicians who work with them. I speak of harpsichords, clavichords, forte pianos, and sublime antique pianos with ivory keys. With all respect to the testimony of the drummer from Phish, I would like to make some points from another population of keyboard players.

The ivory on the keyboards of early instruments was from a time when ivory was legal. The use of ivory as a key cover was not decorative. It was stable and durable. It is part of the integrity of the instrument. Indeed the removal of the ivory key tops from many of these instruments if not done by a good technician could cause damage to the key itself incurring thousands of dollars in repairs for the key set. However, the American piano companies abandoned the use of ivory twenty years before the first ban. The American piano industry used plastic as early as the 50's. The European piano makers ended the use of ivory in the 1980's.

- The piano industry has never been implicated for the use of illegally obtained ivory.
- No piano companies are lobbying for the use of ivory today.
- No piano companies currently use ivory.
- No piano importers have been found attempting to dispense new ivory as old.

In the hands of a skilled technician, instruments of great value could have the ivory replaced. I own two old instruments that have replaced ivory. The value of the piano is not just in the ivory keys. It is in the cabinet, the belly, and the action. Yet, why would you replace the ivory if it is sound? I did because the ivory was old and chipping. I would not have been able to replace the keys with ivory. This is not a choice.

This conversation is not insane or a no-brainer. It is with cooperation and respect that the musical community would like to work with the committee to consider an exemption in bill H.297 for musical instruments manufactured prior to 1975.

In the first testimony, my letter was quoted. It was suggested that I pass along my instrument to my grandchildren. I do not have any and my children do not play the piano. These instruments should be available to the musical community. Many hard working collaborative pianists, performers, and teachers would hope that when the time comes to down size they would be able to sell the instrument that helped them earn their livelihood. I know that musicians will do the "right thing" and cooperate with the law. My hope is that the state of Vermont will do the right thing and support an amendment to this bill.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Nicholas