



My name is Joanne Bourbeau. I serve as the Northeast Regional Director and Vermont State Director for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization. I'm here to register our enthusiastic support for H. 122, An Act Relating to the Possession, Sale and Distribution of Shark Fins. The Vermont Humane Federation, a professional association made up of the state's local animal shelters, is also supportive of this measure. We are grateful to the bill's sponsors and to this Committee for addressing this important matter.

Every year, tens of millions of sharks are killed solely for their fins. The demand for shark fins for shark fin soup drives the cruel practice of shark finning where a shark's fins are cut off, often while the animal is still alive, and the rest of the shark is thrown back into the ocean. The mutilated animal may endure a long and agonizing death. With their fins cut off, sharks cannot swim, and can die from shock, blood loss, starvation or predation by other fish. For more than 400 million years, sharks have inhabited the oceans, yet many shark species today are being pushed to population collapse and possibly extinction.

Although the U.S. has banned this cruel and wasteful practice in our own fisheries; fins currently being imported into and sold in the U.S. could have come from any of the many countries that do *not* have any shark finning regulations or shark management measures. Despite growing recognition of the fragile status of shark populations, the high demand for shark fins for use in soup, and the high prices that people are willing to pay for fins, mean that sharks are increasingly killed for their fins.

As predators at or near the top of marine food chains, sharks help maintain the balance of marine life in the oceans. Research shows that the massive depletion of sharks can have cascading effects throughout ocean ecosystems. Complicating matters, sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing because they are slow to reach reproductive maturity and produce very few offspring.

A ban on the shark fin trade as H. 122 proposes will provide critical protection to sharks and demonstrate Vermont's contribution toward the world's ocean ecosystems and biodiversity. It would also put our state on a par with the growing movement to protect sharks in the U.S. and abroad. Currently nine states, including the Northeast states of Maryland, Delaware, New York, and Massachusetts, along with California, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii and Illinois, have all acted to stop their complicit support of shark finning by banning the sale and trade of shark fins. The U.S. territories American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands have also all acted to stop this barbaric practice.

While currently no restaurants or entities in Vermont have been found selling shark fins, without a prohibition on the shark fin trade in place, it would remain perfectly legal. H. 122 would pose almost no economic impact on Vermont's businesses, while further ensuring

that Vermont does not ever become a part of the destructive shark fin trade. We encourage your support of this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Bourbeau". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to its right.

Joanne Bourbeau
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