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April 6, 2015

The Honorable David Deen  
Chair, House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633

### **Re: H. 297: An Act Relating to the Sale of Ivory or Rhinoceros Horn**

Dear Chairman Deen:

Most respectfully, as the primary Assembly sponsor of the first statewide ban on ivory commerce in the country (which we enacted in New Jersey in 2014), I write to express my utmost support for the bill under consideration by your committee today, to wit, H. 297—legislation that would prohibit the import and sale of ivory or rhinoceros horn within Vermont. As the Committee votes today, I urge you to reflect on the true magnitude of this bill. Should H. 297 pass, the State Legislature of Vermont will have played a role in ensuring the future prosperity of a keystone species while contributing to strengthen national and global security and cut into terrorist organizations' profits from wildlife poaching and trafficking.

Wild elephants are being slaughtered at such alarming rates that 96 elephants are brutally murdered every single day for their ivory. Therefore, another elephant dies at the hands of poachers every 15 minutes. At such a rate, the majestic elephant could be extinct within the next ten to twenty years. No longer will our children and grandchildren learn that "E is for Elephant." Instead, they will come to recognize the elephant not as a beautiful, living creature, but rather, as an animal exploited and driven to extinction by those looking to make a profit.

Profits from the trafficking and poaching of ivory and rhino horn have been inextricably linked to funding the operations of terrorist groups such as al Qaeda-affiliated al Shabaab, Janjaweed, the Lord's Resistance Army, and other evildoers. This has quickly become an issue of national

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security, as major ports throughout the United States serve as hubs for the illegal wildlife trade. While a federal ban on importation and interstate ivory trade already exists, traffickers and distributors have responded by masterfully disguising illegal ivory as *legal* mammoth or fossilized ivory such that even experts are challenged in distinguishing lawful ivory from illegal ivory. To make true enforcement possible, a *complete* ban on ivory commerce would be far more effective than diluted prohibitions that have been proposed in certain other states.

It is up to us as state lawmakers to act more swiftly where Congress has not. We can stop the blood ivory trade. By passing legislation tailored to effectively closing these markets for trade and ending consumer demand, *we* can end poaching and wildlife trafficking. A complete, comprehensive ban on ivory commerce, like the one you are considering, will help to make this a reality.

In New Jersey, we were given a truly amazing opportunity to help stymie this horrible injustice against the noble elephant. Working alongside groups such as Elephants DC, The Humane Society, Born Free USA, and other advocacy organizations, we were able to pass a full ban on ivory and rhino horn sales. Although I am a Democrat, the bill was supported by legislators on both sides of the aisle and was signed into law by a Republican governor despite opposition from conservative groups.

Today, I urge you to join New Jersey and New York in this historic movement. Moreover, the Vermont Legislature has an opportunity to join New Jersey as only the *second* state to enact a comprehensive ban.

Thank you for your kind consideration and for your service.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raj Mukherji". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the bottom.

**RAJ MUKHERJI**

Assemblyman, New Jersey State Legislature