

**Marie M. Johnson
President, Vermont Music Teachers Association
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Testimony Regarding H 297

Good morning. My name is Marie Johnson, and I am the President of the Vermont Music Teachers Association. We are a nonprofit educational organization representing music teachers in Vermont. Our purpose is to promote music education in Vermont and to encourage growth and professional development by providing opportunities that support teaching, performance, composition and research. Our organization touches thousands of Vermonters be they teachers, students or parents. While most of our members are piano teachers, some are also teachers of other musical instruments.

Recently, the Vermont Music Teachers Association held its spring festival at St. Michael's College. Over 70 students performed for sixteen teachers who made recommendations for each student to improve their piano performance skills. All of the students played on pianos housed and owned in Vermont. It was a glorious day celebrating the arts.

I would like to provide testimony today regarding H 297. Our organization strongly condemns the continued illegal poaching of elephants. This is a serious problem that needs to be dealt with at the source. We are in support of any action that stops the illegal flow of ivory and applaud the intent of H 297. We are also intent on preserving the integrity of piano owners and owners of other instruments who are in possession of legally obtained ivory.

The piano industry has always been very cooperative and law abiding regarding ivory content in pianos. Since 1989, any new pianos manufactured domestically or pianos entering US ports have been free of ivory. Over the last 20 years, more production of new pianos has been done overseas in countries like Japan,

Korea, and China to name a few. European countries such as Germany and Austria have also shipped new pianos to the US all free of ivory. Our concern with this issue is based on a 300 plus year history of the piano and the integrity of the owners of instruments with legally obtained ivory – long before the present poaching existed. We find it intrusive and counter-productive to prohibit the owner of a 1943 Steinway grand piano, for example, from selling his/her piano in the music community. In fact, one of my piano students in Essex recently purchased a Steinway piano with ivory keys. The piano was constructed in 1930. It is a wonderful musical instrument being played daily by a talented young Vermonter. If our neighbor were prohibited from purchasing that piano, it may have been discarded in a landfill in Vermont. We do not need pianos in our landfills. A Vermont ban prohibiting the sale of pianos that contain legally obtained ivory keys hurts owners of legally obtained ivory, criminalizes piano owners, and is ineffective in stopping illegal poaching.

The Vermont Music Teachers Association is hopeful that legislation stopping and criminalizing those who obtain ivory illegally can be produced and enforced while preserving the artistic history of the piano, its legally obtained ivory key tops, and preserving the integrity of both the instruments and owners of these instruments.

It is our understanding that both New York and New Jersey have signed bills prohibiting the sale of ivory within their borders. The New York law includes exemptions for all musical instruments made before 1975 which is the date of the ban on poaching Asian elephants. The African ban went into effect in 1990. The New Jersey law has no exemptions but existing objects “can be donated to a nonprofit, museum, or can allow it to be passed through their estate”.

Vermont should be proud of its arts, its musical heritage, and support its growth. Our organization would like to recommend that H 297 be amended to allow the sale of existing, legally crafted musical instruments that contain ivory. Follow the exemption in the New York legislation. We believe this to be a

reasonable resolution. We want to save the elephants and our pianos. There must be a way to do both.

Additional information regarding this topic may be obtained by visiting the website of the Piano Teachers Guild (www.ptg.org) and the Elephant Protection Association (www.elephantprotection.org).

Thank you for considering our request, and for allowing me to testify this morning.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Johnson

President

Vermont Music teachers Association