

Thank you to everyone who is here today acting as a representative for the voiceless and thank you to everyone who is listening as we talk to you about the humanitarian, conservation and ethical reasons about the importance of passing legislation which would ban the sale of parts of our planets most critically endangered species.

I like to open my speeches by sharing African proverb that inspires the work I do. "If you think you're too small to make a difference, you haven't slept in a closed room with a mosquito" The young voices of today are strong, we are loud and we are being heard.

My name is Taegen Yardley. I am a sixteen year old wildlife conservation activist from Stowe. When I was not much older than many of the kids in this room, I attended the documentary "Battle for the Elephants" at the University of Vermont. This movie inspired me to want to take action and raise awareness about the plight of our planets elephants.. Since the age of twelve, I have been making documentaries about critical issues and the plight of our planets most critically endangered species. In these movies, I use the power of young voices to amplify my message and create a ripple effect of education around us and action amongst us.

Over the past three years I have witnessed the ripple effect of the young voices in these movies being heard around the world. The documentaries have been shown at National Geographic, The Department of the Interior, the United Nations, and the 2018 Environmental Facility Assembly meeting in Da Nang Vietnam. The movies are also being used in courses being given by US Fish and Wildlife which take place in Bangkok, Budapest, Gabaron, and San Salvador. I recently returned from London where I received an award from Interpol's Wildlife Crime Working Group which was presented by Prince William, Duke of Cambridge for "Fostering Partnerships in Conservation". I am empowered by the shift that is occurring as officials are beginning to include the younger generation in their discussions. They're beginning to understand that we have the power to be creative and instrumental in inciting change and that we have the desire and the ability to be a part of the solution.

Wildlife trafficking is one of the largest black markets in the world, measuring over \$10 billion a year. It is linked to international criminal networks which threaten national security and it robs developing countries of a major source of revenue by threatening wildlife tourism.

Our planet has lost 1/2 of it's wildlife in the past 40 years. Tens of thousands of

elephants are killed each year. Rhino poaching has increased by 9,000 percent in the last ten years. Over the past two decades alone, the lion population has decreased by 43% with only about 20,000 remaining in the wild. Wild tiger populations have decreased by 97% in the past century. Millions of pangolins have been slaughtered.

The loss of our planet's creatures is eroding life's diversity on earth and the loss of diversity puts all life at risk.

My first movie, "Kids Battle for a World With Elephants" was created in support of Bill, H.297 which was introduced in 2016. At that time, California, New York, New Jersey and Washington had already passed legislation banning the sale of ivory. Bill H.297 was abandoned in the Senate because of a list of exemptions that would have caused more harm than good. Since then close to 100,000 elephants have been killed and Illinois, Hawaii, Nevada, New Hampshire and Oregon have passed similar legislation.

Vermont has an obligation to join this growing list of states. Please make Vermont the 10th state to support the conservation of our planet's most critically endangered species and please pass H.99 with original wording as introduced.

As a result of human greed, we are creating a catastrophic impact on our planet. We are all the mosquito in the closed room and collectively, whether through our direct actions or inactions, we are inflicting pain and suffering on our planet and the creatures who call it home. Imagine the power we hold if we consciously commit to creating a positive impact.

May we never stop asking ourselves "If not me. Then who?"