

October 31, 2016

Senator Dan Sullivan
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sent via email: Pierce_Wiegard@sullivan.senate.gov

RE: Proposed Ban on Walrus Ivory

Dear Senator Sullivan,

On behalf of Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOAI), I write you out of concern over recent legislative efforts to establish a domestic ivory ban. I share your concern that this could have negative impacts on the Iñupiat people of the North Slope and the Alaska Native population.

VOAI is a newly formed 501(c)4 non-profit corporation whose twenty members include representatives from North Slope tribal councils, municipal governments, Alaska Native Corporations, a regional non-profit and the tribal college from the North Slope of Alaska. VOA I was formed to provide a unified, local voice of the Iñupiat people from the Arctic Slope region. We are deeply concerned that a ban on ivory would have adverse economic, social, and cultural impacts to the Iñupiat people, Alaska Native businesses, local artisans, families, and North Slope communities. As a fellow Alaskan with deep regard for the Alaska Native population and our way of life, I request that you voice the potential adverse impacts of this ban to Alaska Natives and defend our traditional use of legally acquired walrus, mammoth, and mastodon ivory.

As you know, many Alaska Natives rely on our local resources and traditional way of life to sustain our communities; this includes the walrus we hunt for subsistence and the ivory we use for construction, tools, arts and crafts. The Iñupiat culture is very vibrant with strong roots in tradition; the preservation of our culture sustains our communities and future generations of Iñupiat. With the proposed legislation to ban domestic ivory in several states, I grow increasingly concerned that this will have negative economic and cultural impacts to the Iñupiat people and other Alaska Natives. Many of the local people rely on the selling of ivory products as a source of income—this domestic ban could not only threaten that but may cause residents to face persecution for buying, owning, or bringing home legally acquired ivory from Alaska.

Member Organizations

Arctic Slope Native Association	City of Anaktuvuk Pass	City of Point Hope	Native Village of Atqasuk	Olgoonik Corporation
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation	City of Atqasuk	City of Wainwright	Native Village of Point Lay	Tikigaq Corporation
Atqasuk Corporation	City of Barrow	Iisaġvik College	North Slope Borough	Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation
	City of Kaktovik	Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation	Nunamuit Corporation	Wainwright Tribal Council

Alaska Natives lawfully harvest walrus as permitted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)—we have relied on walrus long before the government installed these acts and legislation. We utilize the entire walrus, including the ivory tusks, and have done so for many generations. Many local artists and crafts people create and sell ivory products which provide a source of income and local revenue. This proposed ban could threaten this economic opportunity and an appreciation for Alaska Native art. The traditional and cultural use of the resource should be respected by future legislative efforts. I am concerned that efforts to ban domestic ivory which fail to consider its use to indigenous peoples will have enormous economic and cultural impact on Alaska Natives. A ban which is not fully informed about the traditional and economic necessity of legally obtained ivory by indigenous peoples would be culturally insensitive and detrimental to Alaskans.

As a community leader, I am concerned that earnest efforts to protect the African elephant may actually result in negative economic and cultural impacts to Alaska Natives. I ask you to inform your fellow Senators and lawmakers about the unintended consequence of this ban and help clarify their legislation to avoid wrongfully impacting the Iñupiat people and our way of life. Any legislation banning ivory should exclude walrus, mammoth and mastodon ivory. The Iñupiat people have a right to pursue our economic, social, cultural self-determination; the laws of the U.S. should not interfere with that right but support the indigenous populations.

We appreciate your continue support and advocacy for all of the Alaskans, especially the Iñupiat people, and look forward to your continued efforts to clarify these bans in the best interest of the Alaska Native population. We respectfully ask you to encourage collaboration between the Iñupiat people, VOAI, Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and lawmakers.

Taikuu,



Sayers Tuzroyluk, Sr.
President

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