



Undocumented ivory for sale in Washington, D.C.

Investigation reveals the need for a local law to combat trade in elephant ivory in the nation's capital

During an undercover investigation from April to June 2019, the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International found dozens of ivory items worth hundreds of thousands of dollars – in the form of a whole elephant tusk, figurines and jewelry – for sale in Washington, D.C. The city has no local law prohibiting intrastate trade in wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn. Legislation has been introduced in the Council of the District of Columbia that would prohibit sales of certain ivory and rhino horn products within the District.

The investigator found ivory products for sale at L'Enfant Gallery, Frank Milwee Antiques, Capital Antiques, Mercedes Bien Vintage and by two vendors at the Georgetown Flea Market. The investigator observed that L'Enfant Gallery displayed the most elaborate and

expensive ivory pieces the investigator had seen in years of investigating ivory sales across the United States.

Among the items for sale:

- Full elephant tusk, carved - \$600,000
- Multi-figurine ivory game board - \$48,000
- Various ivory figurines - \$100s to \$1,000s

Upon request by the investigator, most ivory sellers were unable to produce documentation to verify the age or origin of the ivory. Without such documentation, it is impossible to know whether items were imported in violation of federal law. The federal Endangered Species Act prohibits the interstate sale and interstate transport in the course of commercial activity involving endangered



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Multiple ivory figurines for sale at L'Enfant Gallery, Washington, D.C.

and threatened species including Asian and African elephants with limited exceptions.

Selected excerpts of conversations between HSUS investigators and ivory sellers:

HSUS investigator: *“Is there anything that comes with it that authenticates it or tells the story of its age or anything?”*

Ivory seller 1: *“I can write it all down. I mean, that’s how we do it. We don’t publish papers.”*

HSUS investigator: *“So, you don’t have anything on the origins? Do you just buy stuff from estate sales?”*

Ivory seller 2: *“I’m an estate liquidator, I know a heck of a lot about a lot, I’m not going to venture opinions on things I don’t know. I can tell you a lot about a lot.”*

HSUS investigator: *“Do you have any idea how old they are?”*

Ivory seller 3: *“I got them from a lady, she’s 87 or 88.”*

HSUS investigator: *“Can you ship it to California?”*

Ivory seller 4: *“... we do it every day ... well, not every day, every week ... and anyway, I don’t label what’s in the boxes.”*

This current investigation reinforces findings from previous investigations in the District. In 2017, the wildlife trade monitoring organization [TRAFFIC found](#) 658 ivory items for sale at 68 locations in the greater Washington, D.C. area. This was greater than the amount of ivory found for sale in the other metropolitan areas surveyed in the same report, and three times the amount found for sale in the D.C. area compared to a similar 2006 survey.

A 2015 [report by the International Fund for Animal Welfare](#) of the

U.S. ivory market that surveyed Craigslist listings identified Washington, D.C., as one of the top five markets among all locations surveyed (44 items identified over a five-day survey).

Legislation in Washington, D.C., [B23-34](#), introduced by councilmembers Mary M. Cheh, Anita Bonds, Elissa Silverman and Brianne K. Nadeau, will ensure that the District does not play a role in facilitating the trade in illegally-acquired ivory and rhino horns by restricting the trade of ivory and rhino horn within the District. Ten states – New York, New Jersey, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, New Hampshire, Illinois and Minnesota – have enacted similar measures in recent years.

The United States is among the world’s largest markets for illegal wildlife goods, including elephant ivory and rhino horn. The illegal wildlife trade is a lucrative, multi-billion-dollar enterprise, fueling transnational crime and incentivizing the cruel killing of animals for their parts.

Legal ivory marketplaces provide an opportunity for illegal ivory to flourish because of the ease of mixing the two. Enforcement efforts are often hampered by a lack of resources or the difficulty of visually distinguishing illegal ivory from legally acquired ivory.

In 2016, the [Great Elephant Census](#) revealed a staggering 30% loss of African savannah elephants between 2007 and 2014 in 15 of the 18 countries surveyed, primarily due to poaching. More than 1,000 rhinos [were poached](#) in Africa in 2018, with only 29,000 remaining in the wild worldwide.

Media downloads of videos and photos of the investigation are available [via the HSUS](#):