



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Release: Avella Introduces Bill Prohibiting Import, Possession, Sale or Transport of "Big Five African Species"

TONY AVELLA April 8, 2015

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(NEW YORK, NY) Today, State Senator Tony Avella was joined by activists from Friends of Animals, League of Human Voters, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and other animal rights groups as he announced the introduction of a bill (S.4686) that would ban the import, possession, sale or transportation in New York of the “Big Five African Species.”

The legislation would protect the African Elephant, African Lion, African Leopard, Black Rhinoceros and White Rhinoceros, all of which are threatened by illegal poaching and sport hunting and are currently at risk. The bill seeks to amend a current state law by including these animals, known as the “Big Five African Species,” in the definition of “foreign game” and prohibiting the import, possession, sale and transportation in New York of any bodies or body parts of these animals.

These five species are frequently hunted in their indigenous regions in Africa, and the bodies are then sold and exported to third parties who take the animal remains as trophies or use the parts to produce goods. Many times, these transactions either pass through the state of New York or end up in possession of buyers located in New York State. This practice has led to an increase in illegal poaching and has also caused some African countries to consider legalizing the sport-hunting of these five species in order to discourage illegal poaching, a flawed idea that does not offer a real solution. The increased killings have put these animals at high risk of ultimate extinction and in need of much stronger protections and enforcement against those who break these regulations.

“Every day, the already minimal populations of these five species continue to drop as hunters seek out these animals, hoping to make a profit off of their bodies. As a longtime animal rights activist, I have always been a strong advocate against the inhumane individuals who see animals only for their worth as corpses. Placing an outright ban on importing, possessing, selling and transporting these animals eliminates much of the incentive to continue hunting them overseas and shipping their remains off to buyers in New York at a high price tag. These animals need our help to stop this cruel cycle. That is why I am proud to introduce this legislation that will go a long way in helping to save the Big Five African Species from extinction. By making it illegal for their remains to be brought into our state, we can do our part in ensuring they are no longer treated simply as products for

sale that are worth more dead than alive,” said Senator Avella.

“I salute Senator Avella’s leadership on this issue. We have to protect those animals who cannot protect themselves,” said Senator George Latimer (D-Port Chester), a co-sponsor of the bill.

“We are grateful to Senator Avella for introducing this historic, critically important legislation that would ban the import, possession, sale or transportation in New York of five species of wild animals, all of which are threatened by illegal poaching and sport hunting and are currently facing extinction in spite of international protections that have been in place for years, and in some cases, for over a decade. Until we can get national bans put in place to reduce the number of sport-hunted African Big Five species brought into this country, it is vital that states like New York take action on their own if we are to have any hope of long-term survival of these species. New York, in particular, is critically important, as a large number of these trophies are imported into and transferred through the state, even if they are ultimately taken to another state. If this law is enacted, it will not only shed light on these problems, but will be the first step of deterring Americans from going to Africa to hunt these animals,” said Edita Birnkrant, Campaigns Director for Friends of Animals.

“NYCLASS commends Senator Avella for introducing a bill to ban the import, possession, sale and transportation of five species of animals native to Africa through New York State. The animals that this bill protects are facing extinction due to human sport hunting. No longer allowing the trophies to pass through New York airports will disincentive such hunts and reduce the number of African Big Five species brought into this country. Last year, JFK was the 17th most popular airport in the world and 6th busiest in the U.S., making it one of the most popular locations to import exotic animal trophies. Thank you to Senator Avella and Friends of Animals for standing up for animals in New York State and around the globe,” said Allie Feldman, Executive Director of NYCLASS.

"As the public becomes increasingly aware of the sensitive and complex lives of animals, we are starting to see a momentous end to the abuse of exotic animals on our home soil, with Ringling Bros. Circus phasing out elephant acts and SeaWorld's stock plunging 50% last year. Now it is time for the Big 5 to follow suit. Increasingly threatened with extinction, each of the Big 5 are equal parts charismatic and keystone, fulfilling niches in their communities that support entire ecosystems, and deserving our utmost protection. LION stands with Senator Avella in protecting our name-sake, as well as elephants, rhinos, and leopards in New York State and abroad," said John Di Leonardo, President and Anthrozoologist, Long Island Orchestrating for Nature.

"Wild animals are not 'trophies,' and true conservationists are those who pay money to keep animals alive by investing in habitat conservation. Only a coward would gun down a critically endangered animal and hang his head on the wall for sport. Human greed is threatening lions, leopards, elephants and rhinos with extinction, and banning their import will send a message that New York does not support this deadly trade," said Ashley Byrne, NYC Campaign Specialist for PETA.

"The problem lies with the phrasing of laws to prohibit imports of endangered species or trophies from hunting them, except with adequate documentation. The money is there to procure whatever documentation is needed. If one person is willing to spend \$350,000 to legally shoot a rhino in Namibia, someone is willing to pay \$20,000 to procure documents needed to bring home an illegally shot stuffed rhino for him to prop up in his trophy room. The law that Senator Avella is proposing is one that has no 'except clause.' The law prohibits importing any of the 'African Big Five' animals or hunting trophies of them. This is precisely what is needed. Thank you, Senator Avella," said Peter Muller, Director of League of Humane Voters of New York State.