



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

## Senator Hoylman Demands Craigslist Crack Down on Sale of Ivory

BRAD HOYLMAN August 12, 2015

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT**



*Recent Report Shows Craigslist is a Trading Hub for Endangered Animal Parts like Elephant Ivory*

*Calls on Founder Craig Newmark to Follow Competitors and Better Publicize Prohibitions, Invest in Filtering Software*

*Hoylman: “Craigslist owes the public an explanation why it won’t stop the black market sale of endangered animal parts on its platform”*

NEW YORK – Today, on World Elephant Day, State Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan), Ranking Member of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, demanded that Craigslist’s founder Craig Newmark and CEO Jim Buckmaster bring a swift end to the illegal sale of endangered animal parts,

including elephant ivory.

In a strongly worded letter, Senator Hoylman acknowledged Craigslist's existing ban on the sale of illegal wildlife, but noted that "the trade continues unabated and more must be done." He identified the difficulty of finding Craigslist's list of prohibited items and the site's user-reliant enforcement mechanism as two contributing problem areas.

Moving forward, Senator Hoylman demanded that Craigslist make its list of prohibited items more accessible to site users by placing the information in a visible location on the site's homepage. He also called on Craigslist to invest in search filtering software already adopted by sites such as competitors eBay and Etsy that would place the burden of monitoring illegal activity on site operators rather than volunteer users.

Senator Hoylman's letter drew on findings from a recent report titled *Elephant Vs Mouse: An Investigation of the Ivory Trade on Craigslist* by the International Fund for Animal Welfare and Wildlife Conservation Society's 96 Elephants campaign, which found that Craigslist currently features hundreds of advertisements for endangered animal parts including illegal elephant ivory. Also, Senator Hoylman's office conducted a casual survey using search terms such as "ivory" and found that this illegal animal part is apparently still available for sale on Craigslist.

"Craigslist owes the public an explanation why it won't stop the black market sale of endangered animal parts on its platform," said Senator Hoylman in the letter.

In June, Senator Hoylman initiated an Ivory Crush held in Times Square, partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Wildlife Conservation Society to draw attention to the illegal ivory trade in New York and its devastating effects on the world's elephant population. Last month, President Obama introduced new federal restrictions on ivory sales in the U.S., which included a ban on interstate commerce and limits on commercial exports.

Senator Hoylman's full letter is below.

August 12, 2015

Craig Newmark, Founder

Jim Buckmaster, CEO

Craigslist, Inc.

1381 9th Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94122

Via Regular Mail & Facsimile: 415-504-6394

Dear Messrs. Newmark and Buckmaster:

I am writing in regard to illicit activities potentially taking place on Craigslist involving the sale of endangered animal parts, including elephant ivory. I demand you take swift action to shut down this activity.

According to a recent report titled *Elephant Vs Mouse: An Investigation of the Ivory Trade on Craigslist* by the International Fund for Animal Welfare and Wildlife Conservation Society's 96 Elephants campaign, Craigslist users regularly post hundreds of advertisements for endangered animal parts including illegal elephant ivory.

I understand that Craigslist already has a policy against the sale of illegal wildlife parts, and that ivory was recently added explicitly to the list of prohibited items. However, as my office learned through a casual online survey, ivory is apparently still available for sale on Craigslist. Clearly, more must be done. Otherwise, Craigslist owes the public an explanation why it won't stop the black market sale of endangered animal parts on its platform.

I call on you to make the following changes to your user interface to crack down on the illegal trade of elephant ivory on Craigslist:

- 1) The list of prohibited items is buried on a difficult-to-find page with no direct link on the homepage. Someone must be actively looking to see the list of prohibited items in order to find it. **I ask that you move the prohibited items list to a more visible location on the homepage.**
- 2) The current enforcement mechanism for the sale of prohibited items is based on users flagging an inappropriate post, thus alerting staff and allowing them to remove the post. This system of relying on

users to identify problem posts obfuscates Craigslist's responsibility to monitor illegal activity on its site. Auction and commerce sites such as eBay and Etsy, competitors of Craigslist, have installed search filtering software that automatically alerts staff to an inappropriate post, and limits the ability of users to search by certain keywords (in this case, such as "ivory"). **Craigslist should follow the best practices of its competitors and invest in this efficient and common sense search filtering software.**

While neither of these requests offer a silver bullet to save a species in such a dire predicament as the elephant, they represent a commitment by Craigslist to crack down on the illegal ivory trade and help save the elephant from extinction.

I thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to hearing your response. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [212-633-8052](tel:212-633-8052).

Sincerely,

Brad Hoylman

New York State Senator

27th District

cc: Azzedine Downes, President and CEO, International Fund for Animal Welfare

Cristián Samper, President and CEO, Wildlife Conservation Society

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