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Maryland House of Delegates,  
Environment and Transportation Committee

Kumar P. Barve, Chair  
Dana Stein, Vice Chair

Via MY MGA

**Re: Veterinary Support of Maryland MD HB22 - to Prohibit the Declawing of Cats**

Dear Delegate Barve, Delegate Stein and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Patricia H. Ladew Foundation, Inc., a cat sanctuary located in Oyster Bay, New York and as a New York veterinarian I strongly support MD HB22 to prohibit the declawing of cats.

As executive director and veterinarian of the Patricia H. Ladew Foundation, Inc., I can tell you from experience that declawed cats are not guaranteed a home. We currently have a no-declaw clause in our contract because in our experience cats that have been declawed more often than not lose their homes because of inappropriate urination and/or biting. We have several declawed cats that we have rescued and are unable to place because of these behavior changes attributed to being declawed. These cats have lost their claws, their homes and were nearly euthanized at city shelters prior to rescue. We have seen this pattern so often that we would rather lose an adoption than adopt to someone who would declaw. In the cities that have banned declawing the adoption rates have not decreased and the relinquishment rates have not increased when comparing the data from shelters in those cities 5 years before the ban compared to 5 years after. This data can be provided to you.

Cats naturally use their claws to assist in climbing and maintaining balance, to help them stretch and exercise, and to escape danger. Cats are commonly declawed in an attempt to protect furniture from unwanted scratching. Occasionally, animals

are declawed in a misinformed attempt to protect human health, despite the CDC's and NIH's advice to "not declaw" to prevent opportunistic disease in immunocompromised individuals. There are safe and effective means to manage undesirable scratching behaviors through simple training and other established methods. My own immune-compromised mother lived to be 100 years old with clawed cats all of her life.

In my 18 years of practice I can tell you that there was only one instance where a client thought he had to declaw his cat due to a health issue. All the rest (and mostly these were kittens) were to protect furniture and most of those were "in case the cat scratches the furniture." At the shelter, it was not uncommon to learn that the adopter had already decided to declaw the kitten before they even picked out the kitten because declawing was something that "they just always did to their cats."

Declawing is much worse than the removal of claws, it actually is the amputation of all or most of the last bone of each of the toes of the animal's feet. The American Veterinary Medical Association lists "anesthetic complications (including death), hemorrhage, infection and pain" as potential complications of declawing. Chronic pain syndromes, permanent lameness, and behavior changes have been described in the veterinary scientific literature as complications of declawing.

Declawing is unnecessary and inhumane. As a shelter veterinarian, I am thrilled that it is already banned in my great state of New York, nine US cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco. In many countries, including in the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden, declawing is illegal, or is considered unethical by established professional veterinary organizations. Veterinarians in Canada have recently voted to ban the procedure in 7 provinces.

When the bill is passed, it will stop the injustices that have been caused by veterinarians to cats for the last 50 years. It is time to stop surgically amputating cats and causing life-long pain to suit the needs of humans and their couches. I hope you and your colleagues will vote to approve this bill as written so that cats can live as cats.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan V. Whittred".

Susan V. Whittred, DVM