



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 445 - Animal Welfare - Declawing Cats - Prohibited Acts

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Committee,

The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization, supports passage of Hb 445 which would end the practice of declawing cats in Maryland. Convenience declawing of cats is already illegal in New York State and in eight California cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the city and county of Denver, Colorado. Australia, Brazil, much of Europe and many Canadian provinces also prohibit non-therapeutic declawing.

Declawing is a medical procedure with serious implications that involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human being, it would be equivalent to cutting off each finger (and toe) at the last knuckle. It is an unnecessary surgery, most often performed to address convenience issues such as problem scratching of household furniture and it provides no medical benefit whatsoever to the cat.

Declawing of cats is not fully condoned by any veterinary medical association. A multitude of veterinarians across Maryland and the country refuse to perform this procedure on ethical grounds, citing that it is an invasive convenience surgery. In the last few years both [the American Animal Hospital Association \(AAHA\)](#) and [American Association of Feline Practitioners \(AAFP\)](#) strengthened their position statements against declawing, with the AAHA now asserting that it "strongly opposes the declawing of domestic cats." The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) opposes any surgical procedure—including declawing—done solely for the convenience of the caregiver and yielding no medical benefit to the companion animal.

This surgery can be extremely painful and may lead to life-long health risks and complications, including behavioral abnormalities such as litter-box aversion and increased biting. These conditions often lead to owner surrender of declawed cats and place financial burdens on already-strained shelters and often, the taxpayer.

On behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, the HSUS supports passage of HB 445, a humane bill which will protect the health and well-being of family pets.

Sincerely,

Emily Hovermale
Maryland and Delaware State Director



18 Reasons to Prohibit Nontherapeutic Declawing

1. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. This removes the dead husks from their claws, marks territory, both visually and with scent glands in their paws, and stretches their muscles. Unfortunately, what is natural behavior for a cat often is considered misbehavior by a cat's human guardian, especially when furniture or other household objects are damaged in the process.
2. Declawing involves amputating the entire last part of the 10 front toes. A comparison in humans would be cutting off a person's finger at the last joint.
3. Current research published in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery in 2017, concluded: *"Declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, manifesting as unwanted behaviors such as inappropriate elimination (soiling/urinating outside of the litter box) and aggression/biting. This is not only detrimental to the cat (pain is a major welfare issue and these behaviors are common reasons for relinquishment of cats to shelters) but also has health implications for their human companions, as cat bites can be serious."* [1]
4. Cat bites carry a dangerously high infection risk to healthy and immunocompromised people alike. According to the Mayo Clinic, 1 in 3 patients with cat bites need to be hospitalized. Two-thirds of those hospitalized needed surgery. [2] In addition, house soiling and biting/aggression are the top behavioral reasons cats are surrendered to shelters.[3, 4]
5. The National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Infectious Diseases Society of America jointly stated that declawing is "not advised" to protect the health of even severely immune-compromised patients, including those with HIV. [5]
6. The American Association of Feline Practitioners in its position statement opposing declawing noted: *"While it has been suggested that declawing is acceptable to prevent spread of zoonotic disease(s) to immune-compromised people, current research demonstrates the greater value of proper hygiene and parasite control."* [6]
7. The American Veterinary Medical Association posits that declawing should remain as a "last resort" to prevent shelter surrenders and euthanasia.[7] However the American Association of Feline Practitioners asserted, *"There is no current peer-reviewed data definitively proving that cats with destructive behavior are more likely to be euthanized, abandoned or relinquished. The decision of whether or not to declaw should not be impacted by these considerations."*[6] After its review of the data on declawing to date, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association also stated that declawing *"is not considered to be a justifiable alternative to relinquishment."* [8]
8. Many countries have banned the nontherapeutic declawing of cats, including Australia, Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and much of the European Union. The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals prohibits the procedure.[9]
9. New York became the first U.S. state to ban nontherapeutic declawing in 2019. With broad bipartisan support the bill passed the Assembly by a 115-31 vote and passed the Senate by a 50-12 vote. Fifty-five New York State animal rescue organizations/shelters and 143 representative New York State veterinarians endorsed the bill. Declawing is also banned in the cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver and St. Louis, Missouri, among others.
10. Concerns that more cats would be surrendered to shelters if declawing is banned is unfounded. Examination of available intake data for shelters in the cities where declaw bans have been enacted shows the contrary, with all shelter systems experiencing lower cat intakes following enactment of the legislation. For example, the Los Angeles municipal shelter documented a 43% reduction in the



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- number of owner-surrendered cats in the five years after the declaw ban was enacted compared to the five years before. [10]
11. A Washington State Veterinary Medical Association's summary of veterinary research on declawing indicated that declaw surgery has been repeatedly shown in research studies to have a 50% immediate post-surgical complication rate, with 1 in 5 cats having long-term complications. [11] Veterinary research has shown one third of cats demonstrating at least one behavioral problem after declawing, as reported by their owners. [12]
 12. Since its founding in 2008, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association has been opposed to nontherapeutic declawing.[13]
 13. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association declared itself opposed to nontherapeutic declawing in 2017.[8] Declawing has been banned by the Veterinary Associations of seven out of ten Canadian provinces: Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta, New Brunswick, and Manitoba.
 14. The American Animal Hospital Association has stated that it "strongly opposes the declawing of domestic cats", noting that it is "major surgery involving amputation." [14]
 15. In 2015, "America's Vet", Dr. Marty Becker, wrote on post-declaw pain syndrome in cats and came to this conclusion on elective declawing: "Let's put this one into the history books where it belongs!" [15]
 16. Many viable alternatives to declawing exist (such as behavior training, nail caps, double-sided tape), as do numerous options in furniture selection, placement and protection which do not physically or behaviorally harm the cat.
 17. Given all this, declawing is still too commonly practiced and not only as a last resort. According to the AVMA's estimation, vets declaw 24.4% of domestic cats.[7]
 18. Some veterinarians have opposed government regulation of medical practice decisions. However, declawing is a distinctly injurious and unethical "convenience" procedure that lacks medical purpose. Many U.S. veterinarians continue to declaw despite professional recommendations against it, and clients are often not made aware of its high risk of permanent adverse effects or its controversies.

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3. Herron, M.E., *Advances in understanding and treatment of feline inappropriate elimination*. Top Companion Anim Med, 2010. **25**(4): p. 195-202.
4. Salman, M.D., et al., *Behavioral Reasons for Relinquishment of Dogs and Cats to 12 Shelters*. Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, 2000. **3**(2): p. 93-106.
5. Kaplan, J.E., et al., *Guidelines for prevention and treatment of opportunistic infections in HIV-infected adults and adolescents: recommendations from CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and the HIV Medicine Association of the Infectious Diseases Society of America*. MMWR Recomm Rep, 2009. **58**(Rr-4): p. 1-207; quiz CE1-4.
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7. AVMA, *Literature Review on the Welfare Implications of Declawing of Domestic Cats*. 2019: American Veterinary Medical Association.
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9. *European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals*, Treaty Series No. 125, in *Treaty Series No. 125*. 1987: Council of Europe.
10. *CAT INTAKE DATA FROM U.S. CITIES WITH DECLAW PROHIBITION LEGISLATION*. 2015: The Paw Project, HSUS, HSVMA factsheet.
11. WSVMA, *Summary of Articles Studying Declawing of Domestic Cats*. 2017: Washington State Veterinary Medical Association.
12. Yeon, S.C., et al., *Attitudes of owners regarding tendonectomy and onychectomy in cats*. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 2001. **218**(1): p. 43-47.
13. HSVMA, *HSVMA Policy Statements: Cosmetic and Convenience Procedures in Companion Animals*. 2010: Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association.
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15. Becker, M., *The Tragedy of Post-declaw Pain Syndrome, and How to Help Cats Who Suffer from It*, in *Dr. Marty Becker Blog*. 2015.