

February 8, 2020

Testimony from Dr Nicholas Dodman, Professor Emeritus, Tufts University, Boston MA

Regarding House Bill 445 - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee:

I am a veterinarian board certified in veterinary anesthesia & analgesia (pain control) and animal behavior. In my anesthesiologist role I witnessed cats recovering from declaw surgery and could barely believe the extreme level of pain they were suffering as they ricocheted around the stainless-steel recovery cages. That was when we did declaw surgery at our vet school. Not long after that declawing was banned at the school for humanitarian reasons.

Declaw surgery has been used as a model for pain studies in the veterinary school in Saskatchewan. This procedure was selected for these studies because it was considered the most painful surgery in cats and was therefore a good model for pain studies.

Declawing traditionally involves removal (amputation) of the last phalanx (finger bone) on both forepaws using a scalpel or guillotine-like nail trimmer. Amputation of digits is defined as a **mutilation** according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary “an act or instance of destroying, removing, or severely damaging a limb or other body part of a person or animal.” Declawing is not only extremely painful immediately post-operatively, it continues to be painful for weeks, months or sometime much longer. Some veterinarians attempt to mute the pain for a few days using analgesics, such as the opioid butorphanol, but pain relief is at best partial and only lasts as long as the medication is continued (around 1- 3 days in the only 50% of practices where analgesia is employed).

Other techniques involve using a cutting laser to remove the last phalanx with it associated nail bed (onychectomy) or cutting tendons to the paws (tendonectomy). Laser onychectomy may help reduce hemorrhage at the time of surgery but is still extremely painful. So why not tendonectomy? It was shown in one study by Yeon et al. (JAVMA, 2001) that onychectomy produces essentially the same post-operative sequelae as tendonectomy, including acute and chronic pain. Over half of the cats undergoing onychectomy and 1/3 of tendonectomized cats had not recovered from the trauma 3 days after surgery. Ten percent of cats undergoing onychectomy required more than 2 weeks to recover completely. Though the authors were only interested in comparisons between the 2 techniques, 28% of cats undergoing either procedure (data pooled) developed a behavior problem after surgery, either house soiling or increased biting. And 42 of 57 cats had at least one medical complication following surgery.

Because of the long-term effects of onychectomy, which include deformity, lameness and chronic pain, many cats require a second surgery to remove pieces of bone left after onychectomy. Cats that have been tendonectomized have abnormally thick claw growth so that claws may grow into the cat's paw pads if they are not frequently trimmed. Furthermore, the cat's now unretractable claws often snag on people, carpet, furniture, and drapes. or from growing into the cat's paw pads. This causes many owners to return to the vet's office for surgical declawing.

Operations to prevent furniture scratching are not for the benefit of the cat. In fact, they are deleterious to the cat and its and welfare. Declawing should be banned, as it already is in some locations in the US (e.g. New York) and in many countries around the world. It is cruel procedure that is elective and unnecessary.

People argue that banning declawing will lead to more surrender of cats to shelters and pounds. But that is not a valid point. Most of the cats in shelters are already declawed. That may be because declawed cats are more likely to bite and eliminate urine and/or feces outside the litterbox. Increased biting by the cat is good reason not to declaw to prevent injury to people or other animals.

There are simple managemental ways to deal with furniture scratching, like erecting suitable scratching posts and valuable furniture can be protected using double-sided sticky tape or other measures. Veterinarians tend to be somewhat cavalier about declawing, which is a money-making concern for some practices who offer it routinely along with spays and castrations "while the cat is under anesthesia."

*If you don't like a cat that scratches, get a dog
If you don't like dogs that barks, get a cat
If you don't like either, get a stuffed animal*

Respectfully yours,



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