

February 5, 2020

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The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
The Honorable Dana M. Stein, Vice-Chair
House Environment & Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: IN SUPPORT OF HB 445 (PROHIBITION OF DECLAWING OF CATS)

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

Let me tell you two stories: First, Leo - he came to me with a terrible upper respiratory infection, dental disease, and arthritis at the young age of eight. He was surrendered, due to his previously owner being "tired" of him. He was withdrawn and dejected, and even after treating his infections, the arthritis remained. We were able to heal his spirit, but we couldn't change what the front-paw amputation had done to his stature - he carried his large body in an unnatural way, leading to discomfort for the rest of his life. Despite living another decade in my care, he was frequently in pain from his arthritis. This cat was incredibly sweet - not mean or destructive in any way. The sweet guy even tried to use a scratch post for his non-existent nails. He deserved better.

Then there was Pepper. She was a feral cat who I was able to rehabilitate. She turned into my companion as a child. However, despite my protests as a child, my mother insisted she be declawed. Poor Pepper, who had always been a huntress, was never the same. During our family's relocation, she got out of the house, never to be seen again. She deserved having all four paws to defend herself.

Declawing is amputation, whether performed by scalpel, clippers, or laser. I believe there is never a reason to declaw for non-therapeutic reasons (that is, unless surgery were necessary to treat animals' medical conditions). Declawing does not keep cats in homes, a fact acknowledged by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP). The state of New York banned declawing in 2019. Seven of the ten Canadian provinces have prohibited declawing by the decisions of the veterinary medical associations there. Eight cities in California - Los Angeles, San Francisco, West Hollywood, Burbank, Santa Monica, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, and Culver City - plus St. Louis, MO and the City and County of Denver, Colorado have enacted declaw bans. Statistics available from those cities indicate that the relinquishment of cats to shelters in those cities, in the years since the bans were enacted, has not increased - in fact, the number of cats dumped in shelters has DECREASED consistently in the years since the laws went into effect.

There is no reason to declaw cats to protect human health. The NIH, CDC, US Public Health Service, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the Canadian Medical Association, all have specifically stated that the declawing is "not advised," even for the animals of persons who are severely immunocompromised, including those with HIV. This opinion is echoed in statements on declawing published by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP). Declawing is not performed in most of the rest of the world. Every state in the U.S. should join the community of humane cities, states, provinces, and nations. They deserve better, and you have the power to make that a reality.

Declawing doesn't solve any problems nor protect anyone. It only hurts the animal. And you have the ability to change that. I am confident you'll make the right decision.

Best,

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