



Advocates for Animals • A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

February 10, 2020

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 CATS)

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

Thank you for considering this important animal protection legislation, which will prohibit the inhumane and unnecessary practice of declawing in Maryland. The Paw Project is a national nonprofit, veterinarian-run organization, with directors in Maryland, that has worked for 20 years to end declawing. Declawing is a series of amputations of all or most of the last bone of each of an animal's toes that is performed in order to prevent unwanted scratching. Declawing removes an integral part of an animal's anatomy and subjects animals to the risks of pain, infection, behavioral changes, and lifelong lameness. Safe and effective alternatives to declawing include simple training, scratching posts, nail caps, barriers, and other established deterrent methods.

Declawing is common in the US and Canada, but it is illegal or considered unethical by veterinarians in most countries. The Paw Project partnered with New York Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal to pass the nation's first state declaw ban in July 2019. There are active anti-declaw bills in NJ, MA, NH, RI, CA, and WV in 2020.

In recent years, public opinion regarding declawing has evolved due to educational campaigns and published evidence exposing the harmful effects of declawing. Eight cities in California, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Burbank, Santa Monica, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, and Culver City, have prohibited declawing. Denver, CO and St. Louis, MO are the ninth and tenth US cities to ban declawing. In the past two years, declawing has been prohibited in seven of ten Canadian provinces, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Alberta, and Prince Edward Island.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) have issued statements strongly opposing declawing. The AAFP states, "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 (by veterinarians) of whether or not to declaw should not be impacted by these considerations." Banfield Pet Hospitals, with 63 clinics in Maryland, has recently stopped offering declawing.

Compelling evidence exists that behavioral changes following declawing can result in the relinquishment of animals to shelters. The CDC and NIH advise pet owners to "not declaw" their animals since declawing is not an effective means of preventing opportunistic disease in immunocompromised individuals.

In 2018, a peer-reviewed scientific article in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* reported that "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."

Paw Project proudly support this bill, which will protect animals in many ways and will end declawing in Maryland.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer Conrad, DVM, Founder and Director, Paw Project