

HB 445 - Animal Welfare - Declawing Cats - Prohibited Acts
SUPPORT TESTIMONY

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 Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support of HB 445, prohibiting the inhumane practice of declawing cats. In the U.S., veterinarians, who have a duty -- and have taken an oath -- to provide animals with care and to act primarily with their welfare in mind, routinely choose to perform amputation of cats' claws and toes (declawing includes amputating the toes at the last joint). To be clear, there are wonderful, humane veterinarians who refuse to do so. Unfortunately, a large number of vets and veterinary practices continue to perform declawing, and show no sign or appetite for stopping.

It is clear that legal protection of cats' welfare is needed, as the veterinary profession in the U.S. (as represented by a number of its professional associations) continues to refuse to take an ethical, humane, and definitive position on declawing. For example, (and perhaps most egregiously) so-called "Cat-Friendly" designation given by The American Association of Feline Practitioners is given to veterinarians and practices that perform declawing. The veterinary profession has -- and has had -- the facts about how cruel, dangerous, and debilitating declawing is, knows the health and behavioral issues cats who have been declawed suffer, and there is ample evidence that declawed cats end up being dumped in shelters (by the same owners who subjected them to this amputation in the first place). That they choose not to act, clearly shows we cannot wait for, or depend on, the veterinary profession and associations to stop this animal cruelty.

Declawing has been shown to lead to health issues and ongoing complications, and behavioral issues (including aggression, due in part to pain and loss of the cat's ability to feel safe and to defend itself). Cats who have been declawed can no longer engage in many of their natural behaviors (scratching/stretching their toes to exercise muscles,

for example, or to play fully and naturally). They can avoid the litterbox (partly due to pain when stepping on cat litter).

In response to people who have weakened immune systems or other medical issues and have expressed concern about getting scratched by a cat, the Centers for Disease Control specifically states "Declawing is not recommended." Additionally, some cats who have been subjected to such amputation may bite when they feel threatened or are trying to defend themselves (as this is their only means of defense now). A deep cat bite would pose a greater health risk than a scratch.

There is no reason to allow this barbaric practice to continue with impunity, and every reason not to. As an animal advocate (and someone who has the privilege of volunteering to work with animals in a sanctuary) I am proud of Maryland's history of leading in a number of humane and progressive areas, including recent legislation to ban puppy mills. Please continue to be a voice for the voiceless; vote to ban declawing. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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