

February 19, 2020

HB 445 - Animal Welfare - Declawing Cats - Prohibited Acts – Favorable with Amendments

Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am honored to be present in front of the body that supported another cat bill that started 20 years ago when fourth Graders from Allegheny County visited Annapolis to learn about how a bill becomes law. After their visit, they wrote a letter to their Delegate Kevin Kelly to introduce a bill designating the calico cat as the official Maryland state cat. They reasoned that Maryland had a state bird, dog and insect, and that the cats' colors of orange/red, black and white represented the state flag. The bill was passed the following spring.

As a feline-exclusive veterinarian in Maryland for more than thirty years, I'm glad this bill has been introduced. It's allowed for important dialogue for our community, and especially within the veterinary profession regarding a medical procedure that is thankfully shrinking into obscurity.

I am also pleased to be a national delegate to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). AVMA recently released modernized guidelines in early 2020 in regards to declawing. *"The AVMA discourages the declawing (onychectomy) of cats as an elective procedure and supports non-surgical alternatives to the procedure. The AVMA respects the veterinarian's right to use professional judgment when deciding how to best protect their individual patients' health and welfare. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the veterinarian to counsel the owner about the natural scratching behavior of cats, the alternatives to surgery, as well as the details of the procedure itself and subsequent potential complications. Onychectomy is a surgical amputation and if performed, multi-modal perioperative pain management must be utilized."*

As a member of the Maryland VMA's issues committee, I am in favor of HB 445 with two amendments:

1. Professional self-regulation. Give us time to work with the board to educate veterinarians in the state about implementing the new AVMA guidelines. There are several continuing education opportunities throughout the year for MDVMA members and we can easily work declawing into our required CEUs. Educating veterinarians, vet techs, and the public about other approaches regarding normal scratching and marking behavior of cats, how to provide proper outlets allowing cats to express normal behavior, effective claw care, and reward for desired claw use and never punishment.
2. Consideration of extreme human health circumstances where in order to preserve the human- feline bond, when a cat's claws were causing injury or illness to a person. This rare exception would allow the owner to keep the cat in its home, and not surrendered to a shelter or otherwise have to give up their companion.

As we consider what a **socially conscious animal community*** looks like in this and future ethical and legislative considerations, right now we have the opportunity to celebrate our State's feline heritage by supporting, with minor yet important amendments, HB 445.

For the Committee's reference, the law designating the calico cat as the official Maryland state cat may be found in the Maryland Statutes, Title 13, Section 13-317.

* "Socially Conscious Animal Communities" is a significant national initiative. It allows all stakeholders to participate in and contribute to discussions that are relevant and important to that community. Two examples are breed-specific legislation, and "no-kill" terminology.

Thank you for the opportunity to present before you today.

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