

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 writing to show my support for MDVMA's position on House Bill 445, the bill to ban declaws in Maryland. This is not to say that I am pro-declaw. I think that would imply that we should promote that procedure. I do not support government making legislation that determines the practice of veterinary medicine.

It is important that the public knows what is involved in the decision-making process on whether to pursue a given surgical procedure as well as the technical aspects of the procedure itself prior to adjudicating. We discuss the pros and cons and risks of all surgeries with our pet owning families. In the case of declawing, we discuss all alternatives including frequent nail trimming, nail caps, scratching posts, pheromone therapy and environmental enrichment. Due to veterinarians' efforts, declawing has been greatly reduced. This procedure is most commonly done for senior citizens who are on blood thinning medications that would make even a small scratch a significant issue.

I would like to discuss my standard surgical protocol and give some specific attention to the declaw procedure. All of my patients are given an analgesic and an anti-anxiety medication prior to surgery. My patients are then placed under general anesthesia using inhalant medications similar to those used in a human hospital. All of my patients have an intravenous catheter and have iv fluids running to maintain appropriate blood pressure. Patients are monitored by a person who is using devices such as an EKG, pulse oximeter and doppler blood pressure monitor. Once under anesthesia a long acting local anesthetic is injected around the surgical site. In my practice, a surgical laser is commonly used as this decreases bleeding and seals nerve endings so that there is less post-operative discomfort. Not all practices use this piece of equipment but I find it especially valuable in the declaw procedure. It makes using a tourniquet unnecessary. During the procedure, bone is not cut. The only tissue that is cut is the soft tissue attachments to the nail. The declaw site is closed with absorbable suture.

I do not think that it is necessary for the government to over regulate the practice of veterinary medicine. The practice of veterinary medicine is currently regulated by the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners which is appointed by the governor. The Board is overseen by the Secretary of Agriculture and is comprised of veterinarians and consumers. One of the functions of the Board is to continually monitor and regulate the standard of veterinary medicine

In closing, I am ideologically opposed to legislation that limits the scope of veterinary practice. I would assume that the medical association would take a similar stance if a similar bill to try to prohibit medical procedures were introduced.

Please consider the amendments discussed today and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

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