



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,

The Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA) was established in 1886 and is the largest professional and advocacy organization for veterinarians and technicians in Maryland. MDVMA's mission is to serve as a leading resource for the veterinary community through communication, education, representation and support for the advancement of animal and public health in Maryland. Our members are licensed practitioners in the fields of small animal, equine and food animal health.

House Bill 445 would prohibit declawing of cats in Maryland. Over the years, the veterinary profession's approach to these procedures has changed drastically. The rare declawing may occur after serious counseling about alternatives if there's an individual in the home who could be significantly harmed by a scratch from a cat. Many of our members do not perform these procedures at all, but we do object to legislating the clinical judgement of practitioners. MDVMA's recommendation is to implement training and education to further reduce or eliminate the procedure entirely.

MDVMA surveyed our members regarding the declawing procedure and the results indicate that:

- Those hospitals that do the procedure all discuss the details and current concerns of surgery and do not perform simply on request.
- No hospitals advertise the procedure.
- The number of declaws performed on average in hospitals that are performing the procedure is 3 per year.
- The majority of the practitioners practicing less than 11 years did not respond to the survey and most informed us that they are not performing or are not practicing the procedure.

Maryland veterinarians who do perform the surgery only do so for extenuating circumstances. Practitioners now discuss declawing concerns with clients and we use post-operative medications for pain in cats that would otherwise be displaced from their owners.

We respectfully request consideration of the following amendments:

1. Time to implement newly released guidelines from our national governing body, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Earlier this year, the AVMA changed their position on 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."

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MDVMA would like to work with our state board on implementing this to reduce or eliminate the procedure across the state. Perhaps we can come back to the committee next year with a survey of completed CEUs regarding the discouragement of declawing and review the need for a ban.

2. If the will of the legislature is to move forward with a ban, then the consideration of extreme human health circumstances should be permissible. MDVMA strongly supports preserving the human- feline bond wherever possible and if a cat's claws are causing injury or illness to a person we advocate for keeping the cat in the home and in the rarest of cases, a declawing procedure may be required to do so. Otherwise, the cat risks being surrendered to a shelter and potentially euthanized under those circumstances.

Sincerely,

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