

Hello, my name is Amish Shah, MD, and I am an emergency physician, as well as a Democratic member of the Arizona House of Representatives. I attended Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago, and I was a faculty member at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine for several years in Manhattan, teaching residents and medical students.

I am testifying in support of SB67. I became interested in this issue after reading about the declaw ban in New York State as well as several other jurisdictions across the country. The practice is widely condemned as cruelty and mutilation, and it is illegal and most developed countries around the world.

Anatomically, the human fingernail arises from a bed just below the skin surface. In a cat, the claw arises from the bone known as the distal phalanx. In order to declaw a cat, one has to amputate the last portion of the finger, including the tendons and soft tissue. This procedure is akin to having the ends of all your fingers amputated, all for the sake of furniture. As in humans, amputation very often leads to chronic pain and debilitation for the animal for the rest of its life. No veterinarian can guarantee with certainty that the procedure will not lead to chronic pain or problems.

Veterinarians and several of their organizations such as the American Association of Feline Practitioners have presented robust scientific evidence of the harm of this procedure and shunned its use. Large veterinary chains have banned it altogether. It is banned in 40 countries.

Opponents of this bill have asserted that declaw procedures might have a benefit to human health. As a practicing Emergency Physician of 15 years, I am here to emphatically and categorically assert that ALL of these claims are false. In all of my years of practice, I have NEVER seen a person seriously harmed by cat scratches from claws. I have NEVER seen a hemophiliac or anti-coagulated person require blood due to scratches. I have NEVER seen someone who is immunocompromised suffer from a serious infection. The CDC and NIH have found no systematic evidence of harm. We watched in the House hearing as the veterinarian opponents made claims about human health concerns, even though they have no training in human medicine.

The scientific literature bears this out, showing that cats who are declawed are much more likely to bite. As a practicing ER doctor, my colleagues and I will attest that cat bite wounds are much more likely to produce an infection and serious harm.

Furthermore, as a former medical school faculty member, a key concept in medical ethics is beneficence. Though we have in the past, physicians today would never advocate for unnecessary antibiotics in pediatrics, lobotomies for psychiatric patients, and overmedication of geriatric patients to benefit a caregiver or someone other than the patient. The practice of declawing violates this basic principle, and examples we heard from the opponents' testimony in the House were alarming and horrifying.

As a member of the Arizona House, I authored a bill co-sponsored by Democrats and Republicans. We had a stakeholder meeting, and we found the opponents' arguments to be baseless and to fall apart under minimal scrutiny. The opponents frequently cited that many good veterinarians would counsel clients out, but never acknowledged the bad actors in their field seem to practice without compunction.

This movement to ban declawing was started by veterinarians in keeping with the oath they took to protect their patients. With a ban in place, veterinarians who are acting in good conscience would level the playing field and not lose out to those who are willing to reject science. I humbly ask for your support on SB67.