



In Support of HB 22 Declawing Myth vs. Fact

Myth #1:

Implementation of this legislation would take away a veterinarian's ability to counsel a client on the onychectomy (declawing) procedure and provide it as a treatment option where he or she deems it to be the suitable medical decision.

Fact: The language of HB22 makes a clear exemption for cases of therapeutic onychectomy, where the surgery is needed for the physical benefit of the animal – such as nail bed tumors or bone infection. Declawing in other instances is not a “medical decision.” In other instances, it is either a convenience procedure and/or an action taken despite current animal welfare or public health recommendations that advise against its use.

Myth #2:

Veterinarians maintain an obligation to provide pet owners a complete education with regard to normal scratching behavior of cats and all available alternatives before performing the procedure. The declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent a cat from using its claws destructively.

Fact: This alleged commitment to provide education and all alternatives to owners before declawing their cats refers to a suggestion/guideline only. It is not an enforced policy within the veterinary profession nor a demonstrably accepted norm. There is no mechanism by any regulatory entity to ensure any veterinarians are accurately and responsibly conveying facts to their clients about this frequently misrepresented and high-risk series of amputations. Declawing being used “only as a last resort” is in fact, unsupported by statistics: as published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, veterinarians have declawed approximately 25% of cats in U.S. homes (at least 20 million cats nationwide). In 2015, "America's Vet", Dr. Marty Becker, came to this conclusion on elective declawing: "Let's put this one into the history books where it belongs!"

Myth #3:

Clawing and scratching can be highly dangerous and detrimental to families with immunocompromised members or family members with other health issues.

Fact: The National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Public Health Service and the Infectious Diseases Society of America have published a joint statement that clearly states “declawing is not advised” to prevent disease spread to healthy or immune-compromised individuals, including those with HIV.

Veterinary journal articles, including a recently published article by Dr. Nicole Martell-Moran in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, find that declawed cats are more likely to bite, which paradoxically places

medically compromised people at greater risk. The CDC and NIH recommend washing cat scratches with soap and water. Cat bites, on the contrary, pose dramatically greater infection and bleeding risk to both healthy and health-compromised individuals. According to The Mayo Clinic, one out of three cat bites result in hospitalization, and over 65% of those hospitalized require hand surgery.

Myth #4:

Declawing should remain a viable alternative to shelter surrender and euthanasia if all other options have failed.

Fact: Reports in peer-reviewed veterinary research journals indicate that declawing is associated with increased litter box avoidance and increased force and/or frequency of biting. These, not furniture scratching, are the top two behavioral reasons why cats are surrendered to U.S. shelters. The majority of cats surrendered to shelters are euthanized.

Declawing is illegal or considered unethical by veterinarians in most of the world. Declaw prohibition legislation has been enacted in several U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, West Hollywood, Berkeley, Culver City, Beverly Hills, and Burbank. In recent years, declawing has also been banned in Denver, Austin, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Madison. It is also prohibited in the state of New York and in eight of the ten Canadian provinces. In every city with available data, each had a documented reduction in cat intakes to their shelter systems after enacting the legislation. These reductions have remained consistently lower to the present. The Los Angeles shelter system reports a 43.4% reduction in the number of owner-surrendered cats after the declaw ban was enacted. A 2021 study from British Columbia, where declawing was banned in 2018, showed no increase in relinquishment of cats to animal shelters and, specifically, no increase in relinquishment of cats for destructive scratching.

In 2017, the American Association of Feline Practitioners stated that, “There is no current peer-reviewed data definitively proving that cats with destructive behavior are more likely to be euthanized, abandoned or relinquished. The decision (by veterinarians) of whether or not to declaw should not be impacted by these considerations.”

Myth #5:

The surgical performance of an onychectomy by a trained veterinarian is done with proper anesthesia and multimodal pain control, making it indistinguishable from other surgical procedures performed on cats and other animals. In addition, when done with a laser, the procedure is painless.

Fact: Unlike surgeries performed for therapeutic reasons, declawing subjects cats to serious risks while providing no medical benefit whatsoever. Declawing has an extremely high post-surgical complication rate of 50%. In addition, 20% of declawed cats show long-term adverse effects; these high complication rates are not typical among common therapeutic veterinary surgeries. There is no evidence that declawing performed with a laser provides any significant short-term benefit, and since declawing involves at least ten separate amputations of toe bones, the long-term complications of declawing, whether performed by scalpel, clippers, or laser, will occur independently of the technique used.

Declawed cats suffer from behavioral problems. They are less likely to use the litter box due to foot and back pain. Dr. Nicole Martell-Moran’s article in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, found that declawed cats are more likely to bite.