



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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January 19, 2022

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chairman, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Animal Welfare – Declawing Cats- Prohibited Acts – HB 22- Support

Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein, members of the Environment & Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the House Environment & Transportation Committee vote favorably for Animal Welfare – Declawing Cats- Prohibited Acts – HB 22.

The most frequent type of declawing is called an onychectomy, which involves using a scalpel or laser to amputate the last bone of a cat's toes on its paws.

Think of surgically amputating a person's fingers or toes at their top joint. Studies have found that declawed cats have a higher percentage of a stress hormone, cortisol, which is often associated with pain. Scans of declawed cat paws often detect leftover bone fragments from the surgery. This can make it painful for these cats as they step on these tiny bone fragments when they walk.

Cats can continue to feel pain after the declawing procedure. Part of a cat's weight is distributed on its toes - so after the declawing process their gait must change to redistribute their weight through their paws. Declawing can affect a cat's balance. Cats rely on their paws, and claws, for behavioral and grooming needs. Their claws help them to protect and defend themselves.

Studies suggest that declawed cats are more likely to have health problems, such as back pain, or behavioral problems, such as aggression. Declawing is a surgical procedure, so cats are at risk for surgical complications such as excessive bleeding, swelling, infections, paw pad lacerations, nerve damage, lameness, and chronic pain. Even using the litter box can be painful on declawed paws.

There are times when this procedure is necessary. This bill does allow veterinarians to do this procedure for medical reasons, such as a severely infected nail bed or tumor.

During the summer of 2021, an HSUS intern for MD selected veterinary hospitals from every county of the state. I have attached the full study but have highlighted a few of the key findings:

- 30 practices responded, representing Counties across Maryland
- 40% of the practices surveyed still perform declaw surgeries for non-medical reasons. There is no geographic correlation to whether a practice offers the surgery or not
- Of those practices that still perform declaw procedures, nearly 70% provide it to protect household items such as furniture or carpets.

From this informal study we have ample evidence that the practice of declawing cats is happening in Maryland, it is happening for non-medically required reasons, and it is happening across the state.

New York outlawed elective declawing in 2019. Fourteen US cities have banned the practice including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Austin, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh. Elective declawing is illegal in most of Europe as well as in Brazil, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand.

Our cats look up to us and count on us to care for and protect them. Declawing is an act of mutilation that should not be done for our benefit. There are far more humane, inexpensive, and effective ways to stop our cats from scratching the furniture.

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Charkoudian for her sponsorship of HB 22 and ask the committee to give this bill a favorable report.

De-Knuckling in Maryland: State Survey

During the summer of 2021, an HSUS intern for MD selected veterinary hospitals from every county of the state. The hospitals were randomly generated from an internet search, although hospitals that are part of Mars Veterinary Health, which officially prohibits declaw procedures, were excluded. The hospitals were asked their County of operation; whether they perform declaw; and then the reason they do or do not perform the surgery. Responses were voluntary and confidential. The survey was conducted via Google Forms and respondents were allowed to add their own answers to the questions.

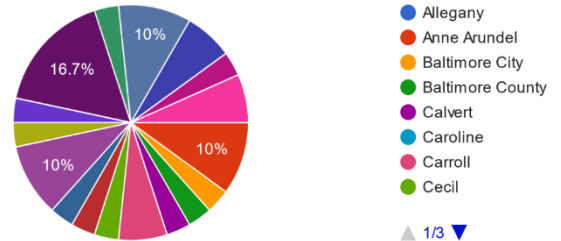
30 practices responded, representing Counties across Maryland. 5 responses were from Prince George's. There were 3 from each of Anne Arundel, Frederick, and St. Mary's. There were 2 from each of Carroll, Somerset, and Worcester. The only Counties that did not have a response were Allegany, Caroline, Garrett, Kent, Montgomery, Talbot, and Washington. All other Counties had one response each.

40% of the practices surveyed still perform declaw surgeries for non-medical reasons. There is no geographic correlation to whether a practice offers the surgery or not; practices in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Harford, Frederick, Prince George's, Somerset, St. Mary's, and Wicomico Counties all stated they no longer perform the surgery.

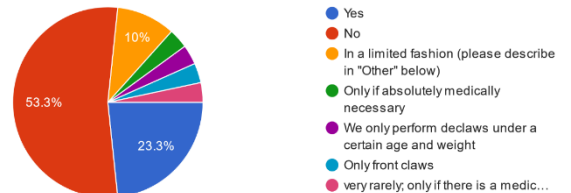
Of those practices that still perform declaw procedures, nearly 70% provide it to protect household items such as furniture or carpets.

Of the practices who do not perform declaw procedures, several stated it is "inhumane" or "cruel." One stated the practice is "Scientifically unnecessary and inhumane." **One wrote, "I personally believe that declawing is barbaric and morally repugnant."**

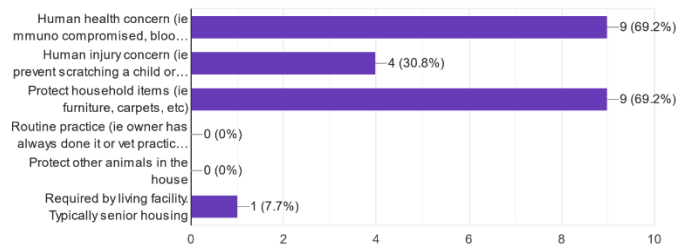
In what county is your practice located?
30 responses



Does your veterinary practice provide declaw operations?
30 responses



If your practice DOES provide declaw operations, for which of the following reasons do owners request it? (Please select all that apply)
13 responses



If your practice does NOT perform declaw operations, what is the reason? (Please select all that apply)
18 responses

