

Dear Legislatures,

I am a veterinarian and I have committed my life to advocate for the health of animals. I have a great love for all animals, but I especially find cats to be compelling and beautiful companions.

I urge you to vote down House Bill 0912. This would legalize abandonment of cats, jeopardize our communities' health, and threaten our environment. Advocates of Trap-Neuter-Release see it as a way to ultimately control feral cat populations, but it has been scientifically proven not to work. "Cat Wars: The Deadly Consequences of a Cuddly Killer" is a book written by Peter P. Marra and Chris Santella. This book is about the dangers of free-ranging cats to biodiversity and public health and outlines the controversies surrounding their management. In it they outline scientific studies that underscore the failures of TNR, why it doesn't and cannot work, and even suggest better ways forward. I honestly don't think that a vote should be taken on this bill until everyone who has a vote has read this book and fully understands the implications of what they are doing. I know that the feral cat issue is a man-made problem, but we need to come up with a better man-made solution than this!

Cats are "the ultimate generalist predator" according to Sarah Legge of the Charles Darwin University. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species. While researching just what a cat may hunt, one can find lists of over 2000 species that have been known to fall prey to them - and perhaps up to 63 of these species are now extinct, due in large part to their predation. According to one estimate, cats kill approximately 1.3 to 4 billion birds annually in the United States. Many of the species are of threatened status - with cat predation pushing them to complete extinction. All cats have the hunting instinct, and even well fed cats will hunt, though perhaps not consume their prey.

Cats themselves face huge threats when free roaming in the environment. They can also be the prey. Other hazards are toxins they can inadvertently ingest, trauma and diseases. Many of the diseases they encounter can be carried home to their human caretakers - such as rabies, toxoplasmosis and a wide range of parasites. I am hoping that everyone voting on this bill remembers the horrible mess when a feral cat from a supposed managed colony in Baltimore County on August 2024 exposed at least 3 individuals in the community to rabies. I am sure that they certainly remember the painful injections of the prevention series they were required to take! If a child had been nipped by that rabid cat and failed to tell their parents - imagine the horror.

Trap/neuter/release (TNR) programs designed to contain feral cat populations have been shown unequivocally not to work, but rather magnify all the concerns already outlined here. Cats in these colonies live short, brutal lives. It is a failed experiment and is not a solution.

As a veterinarian, I wish to advocate for my beloved feline friends and our environment in general by taking the stand that all cats should be contained in an environment that protects them from these hazards and the ecosystem from their predation. It is a fallacy to assume that they are

“part of the circle of life” as they are an efficient apex predator put into an ecosystem that did not coevolve with them. As a veterinarian, I contend that all cats can live happy fulfilled lives indoors. Structures such as “catios” and other enrichments can safely replace the outdoor lifestyle. This would require equity and determined caretakers, but should be the goal rather than simply legislating that it is OK to neuter the poor things, lop off their ears and kick them outside to fend for themselves. It is pie in the sky that they have access to shelter, food, and medical care. I dream of a future where our culture does not accept free range cats, just as we do not accept free range dogs.

Vote no to House Bill 0912. Dream with me that we can come up with a better solution that does not codify this abandonment of cats, our environment and health of our community.

Sincerely,

Karlyn S. McPartland, DVM