



**HUMANE SOCIETY
VETERINARY MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION.**

21 January 2022

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Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair
Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Maryland Legislature
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: VETERINARY SUPPORT for HB 22/SB 67, prohibiting declawing of cats in Maryland

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) to convey our strong support for HB 22/SB 67, legislation that would end the practice of declawing cats in Maryland unless medically necessary to treat a physical illness, injury or disease. HSVMA is a national association of approximately 9,000 veterinary professionals—including more than 230 Maryland members—focused on the health and welfare of all animals, including companion cats.

Declawing is a painful, invasive surgery—a series of 10-18 separate amputations of the last bones of a cat's toes. Contrary to widely-held belief, declawing is not simply removal of nails. It is typically performed for convenience and to avoid possible damage to household items. However, declawing exposes the patient to risks of anesthesia, infection and blood loss as well as chronic pain, nerve damage and lameness.

Research has repeatedly indicated not only a high post-operative complication rate of 50%, but also an increased likelihood of declawed cats biting and avoiding the litter box. Tragically, these are the primary behavioral reasons why cats are relinquished to shelters, where many face euthanasia. A prominent 2017 study in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* found that 63% of declawed cats had painful bone fragments remaining after surgery. This led to further exacerbation of permanent side effects, including back pain and litter box avoidance.

Scratching is a normal feline behavior. It removes dead husks from cats' claws, marks territory, and stretches muscles. Where scratching may be a problem, HSVMA advocates the use of humane alternatives. These are better not only for the cats' health, but also for cat owners who are often not informed about the common, expensive, frustrating and potentially dangerous consequences of this misguided



procedure. Sensible alternatives include well-selected scratching posts, alternative furniture selection or placement, nail trims, training, and nail caps.

HSVMA joins the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) in being strongly opposed to convenience declawing. Declawing has already been prohibited in dozens of countries worldwide, as well as 13 U.S. cities—Madison, WI; Austin, TX; Denver, CO; St. Louis, MO; Pittsburgh, PA and Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Monica, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, Burbank, Culver City and West Hollywood, CA. In 2019 the first bill to prohibit convenience declawing statewide was signed into law in New York. If HB 22/SB 67 is enacted, Maryland will become the second state in the nation to prohibit this inhumane surgical procedure.

We strongly urge you and your colleagues in the Maryland legislature to demonstrate your humane leadership by supporting passage of HB 22/SB 67.

Respectfully,

Nikhil Joshi, VMD

Carrie Waters, DVM, PhD, JD, DACVIM

HSVMA Maryland State Representatives