



Advocates for Animals • A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

January 20, 2022

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

RE: In Strong Support of SB67 (Animal Welfare - Declawing Cats - Prohibited Acts)

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee members:

Thank you for introducing SB 67, an important animal protection bill, which will prohibit the inhumane and unnecessary practice of declawing in Maryland. The Paw Project is a national nonprofit, veterinarian-run organization that has worked for 20 years to end declawing. Declawing is, most commonly, a series of amputations of all or most of the last bone of each of an animal's toes performed to prevent unwanted scratching. Declawing removes an integral part of an animal's anatomy and subjects animals to the risks of pain, infection, behavioral changes, and lifelong lameness. Safe and effective alternatives to declawing include simple training and other established deterrent methods. We urge your colleagues to vote YES on this bill.

Declawing is common in the US and Canada, but it is illegal or considered unethical by veterinarians in most countries. The Paw Project partnered with New York Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal to pass the nation's first statewide declaw ban in July 2019. There are active anti-declaw bills in NH, MA, PA, and CA in 2022. In recent years, public opinion regarding declawing has evolved due to educational campaigns and published evidence exposing the harmful effects of declawing. Eight cities in California, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Burbank, Santa Monica, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, and Culver City, have prohibited declawing. Denver, CO, Austin, TX, St. Louis, MO, Pittsburgh, PA and Madison, WI are the other US cities to ban declawing. In the past four years, declawing has been prohibited in eight of ten Canadian provinces, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and Fear Free™ forbids their certified practices from performing declaw surgery. The AAFP states, "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." VCA and Banfield Hospitals, which operate many clinics in the state, will not perform "below standard of care" declaw procedures.

Much evidence exists that behavioral changes following declawing can result in the relinquishment of animals to shelters. The CDC and NIH advise pet owners to "not declaw" their animals since declawing is not an effective means of preventing opportunistic disease in immunocompromised individuals.

In 2018, a peer-reviewed scientific article in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* reported that "declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, manifesting as unwanted behaviors such as inappropriate elimination (soiling/urinating outside of the litter box) and aggression/biting. This is not only detrimental to the cat (pain is a major welfare issue and these behaviors are common reasons for relinquishment of cats to shelters), but also has health implications for their human companions, as cat bites can be serious."

We proudly support this bill, which will greatly protect animals and will end declawing in Maryland.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer Conrad, DVM, Founder and Director, Paw Project