

May 26, 2015

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Senator Sara Gelser
Chair, Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for -5A Amendment to HB 3494, regarding declawing and devocalization of animals

Dear Senator Gelser,

I am writing on behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) to convey our support for the -5A Amendment to HB 3494, which would eliminate exemptions to the proposed ban on declawing and devocalization. With the -5A Amendment, HB 3494 would appropriately ban the declawing and devocalization of animals unless medically necessary to treat a physical illness, injury or disease or to correct a congenital abnormality that is causing or will cause the animal physical harm or pain.

HSVMA is a nationwide association of veterinary professionals—including approximately 150 Oregon veterinarians, veterinary technicians and veterinary students—which focuses on animal health and welfare. HSVMA is strongly opposed to surgical procedures performed on companion animals solely for the convenience or preference of the caregiver, which is the case with most declaw and devocalization procedures. We also support both legislative and educational initiatives to ban these potentially harmful practices when not medically necessary.

With the above referenced amendment, HB 3494 is an important animal welfare measure that has the potential to protect our animal companions from unnecessary and risky medical procedures.

DEVOCALIZATION:

Devocalization is an invasive surgical procedure that is typically performed for the convenience of the owner to avoid excessive vocalization by the animal. As with all surgical procedures, it involves the

inherent risks of anesthesia, infection, blood loss and other serious complications. Furthermore, chronic coughing and gagging are common post-surgical side effects, and long-term complications may include the development of scarred vocal cord tissue regrowth, which may lead to the need for additional surgeries.

Vocalization is a normal behavior that allows dogs and cats to communicate with people and other animals. Excessive vocalization can be caused by a variety of factors, including boredom, anxiety and a sedentary lifestyle. Although it may take significant commitment by the owner, these issues can usually be addressed with obedience training, exercise, environmental enrichment and other humane behavior modification methods.

The current language in HB 3494 allows for devocalization surgery to be performed when behavioral modifications have “failed.” This could create a major loophole for owners who do not want to invest the time and resources needed for humane behavioral modification, and thus the -5A Amendment would eliminate this risky loophole.

DECLAWING:

Declawing is amputation surgery that is typically performed for the convenience of the owner to prevent cats from causing damage to furniture and other household items. Declawing is an invasive surgery—a series of amputations of the last bones of the ten front (and sometimes, also, the eight rear) toes. It exposes the patient to possibilities of the risks of anesthesia, infection and blood loss as well as chronic pain, nerve damage and lameness. Furthermore, declawing has the potential to cause behavioral problems.

Scratching is a normal feline behavior. It removes the dead husks from their claws, marks territory, both visually and with scent glands, and stretches the cat’s muscles. For cats who are causing property damage with their scratching, the HSVMA advocates the use of humane alternatives, such as scratching posts, regular nail trims, and nail caps.

The current language in HB 3494, which allows for an exemption for declaw surgery when attempts to prevent property damage have “failed,” could be problematic. The -5A Amendment will help ensure that cat owners invest the time and resources to implement alternatives to declawing.

SUPPORT FOR HB 3494 WITH -5A AMENDMENT:

For the reasons outlined above, the HSVMA strongly supports the -5A Amendment to HB 3494, which would eliminate the exemptions for unsubstantiated behavioral reasons of the pet and health issues related to the owner. Devocalization and declaw procedures should only be performed, by a licensed veterinarian, when necessary to treat a medical illness, injury or disease causing physical harm or pain to the animal.

Again, we thank you for introducing this important animal welfare measure, and we look forward to its passage with the -5A Amendment, protecting animals from unnecessary and harmful medical procedures.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Susan B. Krebsbach, DVM
Veterinary Advisor
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association
Email: skrebsbach@hsvma.org