

Hello and thank you for your time,

I am writing today to express my deep concerns about Bill HB 3494 which would allow the widespread socially acceptable practices of declawing cats and devocalizing dogs. I believe that many who wrote this bill did so with the best of intentions, especially since the original bill would have banned landlords from requiring such practices for their tenants with pets. However, the current wording of this bill does nothing to protect the rights of cats and dogs. And because that is the entire purported purpose of the bill, this lack of protection is not only a serious problem, but completely negates the validity of the bill.

For cats: A cat has claws for a reason. Just like a person has toes for a reason. A cat's claws are their primary defense in the wild. I have seen stray cats that had been declawed by their previous owners and were left without any form of protecting themselves. An outdoor cat has a lifespan of approximately 2 years, and that is with claws. Imagine the terrifying fate of a declawed cat forced to survive on its own outside without its primary defense. Whether or not there is ever a valid reason to declaw a cat is debatable and I will not address my reasons for or against it in this forum. However, I will say that a bill that allows owners to declaw cats as long as they simply claim to have tried other methods is inhumane, ineffective, and cruel. If this bill is truly going to be a step in the right direction for cats, then these exceptions need to be spelled out and the measures previously taken need to be documented and verified before a vet can take action. I should not be able to walk into a vet and say "Hi my name is Nicole. I have tried so many methods to get my cat to stop scratching, but nothing has worked! This is my last hope. Please declaw my cat!" See how easy that was? I promise none of it was true. But the current law would allow that vet to declaw my cat. Another disturbing problem with this bill is that the section which would prohibit landlords from declawing cats and devocalizing dogs was omitted. I cannot understand what sort of logic would remove that from the bill. That was the only tangible, verifiable, enforceable section present in HB 3494, and to omit it is negligent at best, and abusive at worst.

The second part of the bill would allow devocalizing of dogs. This is something I simply cannot stand for. Imagine the pain, depression, and hopelessness that would arise in you if someone removed your voice box. Imagine adopting a child and then removing her ability to speak. This practice is deplorable in any and all circumstances. There are no exceptions. If you have an overly stimulated dog, go to a trainer. Work on the behavior. And if you really cannot handle the barking and it's too much for you, take that dog to a shelter. Shelters offer a lot of support and training. Devocalizing a dog for ANY reason whatsoever speaks volumes about you as a person and your lack of compassion for the animal you claim to love. Owning an animal is *not* a right. Dogs bark to warn their families of danger, to save people from burning buildings, to show excitement and play with their owners and families, and to express their needs. Taking away a dog's ability to communicate with you is worse than never having adopted the animal at all. If you cannot handle that your dog barks, what do you think of your child that cries? They are communicating in the same way. Both are natural and normal. Devocalizing is a cruel and vile practice, and a bill that allows it in any form is not a bill I can support.

Gandhi once said, "The greatness of a nation will be judged by the way it treats its animals." This is our moment to decide how we want to be judged. I hope we will decide carefully and compassionately.

Thank you.

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