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May 31, 2015

Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Gesler and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bonne VeVea, and I am Executive Director of Mercer Island Eastside Orphans & Waifs, commonly known as MEOW Cat Rescue, in Kirkland, Washington. A 501c3 non-profit no-kill animal rescue since 1997, MEOW has rescued and rehomed more than 20,000 cats and dogs. We have always held that, except in very few exceptional cases, declawing and debarking surgeries are not for the benefit of the animal. In fact, our cat adoption contract has a no-declaw clause which is actually enforceable in a court of law. Although we always encourage people to adopt locally, in this mobile society we recognize that pets sometimes move with owners to other states and some of these pets will undoubtedly end up in that state's shelters and rescues. The subject matter of HB 3494 is one of great concern to us.

I am writing today to urge you to oppose HB 3494 unless amended to remove all non-therapeutic exceptions. Although the bill is intended to reduce the devocalization of dogs and declawing of cats, the exemptions in the bill as written not only render the bill ineffective in reducing the incidence of these inhumane procedures, but in fact give them a veneer of legitimacy by explicitly codifying their acceptance into law.

Unless all non-therapeutic exceptions are removed, animals in Oregon will continue to be at risk of being maimed by these appalling and unnecessary procedures. As written, pet owners may simply assert that this is the "last resort" open to them, regardless of what efforts, if any they have made to employ behavioral approaches. Quite simply, the bill as written is unenforceable.

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Of most concern to us is the claim that declawing keeps cats in homes. In my twenty years experience in cat rescue, I have seen quite the opposite to be true. Due to residual pain and resulting anxiety, declawed cats have been seen more frequently to exhibit problems such as litter box avoidance and biting, leading to the surrender or abandoning of these cats. According to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy's Shelter Survey, house soiling ranks as the top behavioral reason for surrender to a shelter, whereas destruction of household objects does not even rank in the top 10. Inappropriate urination and biting behaviors are common, one might say predictable, among declawed cats. Shelters struggle to correct these behaviors, sometimes unsuccessfully. Even after employing the best behavioral modification and medical intervention these cats may be returned again and again. A cat who is urinating inappropriately is usually unwelcome in any home and a declawed cat is not an appropriate candidate for an outdoor life. Clearly, declawing is not in the best interest of cats or even of their owners. These preventable behaviors break the bonds between owner and pet.

We urge you to oppose HB 3494 unless these overly broad, damaging, and entirely unenforceable exemptions are removed. Amendment A5 would close the loopholes by mandating these surgeries be employed only when medically necessary *for the animal*. We would urge you, therefore, to support the bill in its amended form.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bonne VeVea", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bonne VeVea, Executive Director  
Mercer Island Eastside Orphans & Waifs (MEOOW Cat Rescue)