

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to House Bill 3494-A as it is presently written. I have a strong interest in animal welfare, both professionally and personally, and I am vehemently opposed to this Bill. I firmly believe that, in its present form, HB 3494-A will allow cat declawing and dog debarking to continue in an unchecked manner thereby endangering the health and welfare of myriads of cats and dogs.

As a professional, I have worked with animals in an academic research setting for the past 23 years. Animal welfare has always been my primary concern. I have always respected the checks and balances that are in place to ensure animal welfare in this academic environment. We work under stringent animal protocols and both the protocols and environment are rigorously reviewed and inspected on a regular basis—both at the university and national levels. Regarding HB 3494-A, I fail to see how any pet owner's attempts to sufficiently address the clawing or barking behavior will be monitored or evaluated in any manner, let alone an adequate manner, prior to allowing a declaw or debark procedure. Who will make this judgment and enforce the policy? What evidence will be considered and what proof will be required regarding this evidence? Against what standards will the evidence be weighed? I fear that this Bill, as written, will fail to protect cats and dogs and instead lead to a slippery slope of senseless declaw and debark procedures.

On a personal level, I would like to voice my opposition as the owner of a cat that has been completely declawed—both front and back. I want to begin by dispelling a myth that declawed cats are never given up to shelters or the Humane Society. My husband and I adopted Panther 5 years ago from a shelter when he was about 5 years old. His first owners gave him to the shelter because they could no longer deal with his anti-social hiding behavior, marking behavior and his refusal to eat. They wanted a "social cat". They wanted a "normal cat." Well, Panther was social and normal, at least until he was declawed. He recovered physically after the procedure, albeit with a marked limp, but he was clearly not the same cat. He was fearful, anxious, anorexic and urinating and voiding inappropriately. That was not the cat the owners had signed up for so off to the shelter he went.

When my husband and I first saw Panther at the shelter, he was thin and curled up inside a cat carrier. The workers at the shelter said that he rarely came out, except to eat and sometimes use a litter box, and that he never socialized with any of the other cats. He came out to eat while we were there, and almost immediately became embroiled in a hissing/spitting fit with the other cats. That's what happens when you have no claws at all and the other cats have a full complement. You are always the low man on the totem pole and you have to "fight" for what you want. You have to urinate on your favorite chair, bed or rug to mark it as yours so that you have a place to relax and call your own. You have to hiss and spit to get to the food and water bowls, on those rare occasions when you feel like eating—although usually you would rather just stay in your carrier and not eat at all. Thankfully, Panther did not become physically aggressive and begin biting. Panther was already 5 years old which made it unlikely that he would be adopted. With his behavioral history added into the mix, his chances for adoption were very, very slim. His story tugged at our heartstrings, and we brought him home.

What is Panther like today? He still walks with a limp. We have earned his trust and he is no longer fearful or anxious in our home except when others come to visit. He is still fearful of all other cats and will not socialize with cats or any other animals. Any trip to the Veterinarian's office causes him undue stress. We have worked through most of the inappropriate urinating and voiding behavior. When he fails to use his box, we don't scold or punish him. We clean up and move on. Why? Because we LOVE our Panther!

We humans domesticated cats and dogs and turned them into pets. Along with this came the responsibility to care for our pets, not only when it is convenient for us but ALWAYS and in a manner which is NUTURING and ensures the OPTIMAL HEALTH of our feline and canine friends. Declawing and debarking procedures are neither nurturing nor health promoting. They are purely selfish behaviors used to make the lives of humans easier. These procedures cause problems and HB 3494-A, in its present form, will only add to this ongoing problem.

Respectfully,

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Research Scientist