

June 1st, 2015

Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood  
Public Hearing Date: June 2nd, 2015  
**RE: Oregon HB 3494-A**

To the Honorable Sara Gelser and Committee Members,

My name is Ashley Portmann, and I am a small animal veterinarian practicing in Bend, Oregon. I am writing to ask you to oppose A-Engrossed Oregon House Bill 3494, as currently written, which is going to public hearing in the Senate June 2nd, 2015.

This bill purportedly aims to ban landlord-mandated declawing and devocalization, however there are many exceptions written into the bill that would still allow these acts of cruelty to be performed. If this bill passes, as currently written with exceptions, it could actually serve to legitimize declawing and devocalization, as well as set up a dangerous legal precedent by which other states could further justify declawing and devocalization. I will be speaking specifically about declawing, however the implications of this bill for devocalizing dogs are similarly detrimental to our pets and to any further meaningful legislation.

Specifically, the amendments to Section 2 of HB3494 (“a person may not declaw a cat unless:”) allow for declawing in certain situations and provide enough exceptions to the declaw ban that many procedures will still be performed under legal circumstance:

*“(a) The person performing the procedure is a licensed veterinarian;”*

Even when performed by a licensed veterinarian, declawing is still an act of cruelty, in which at least 10 (and sometimes 20) amputations are performed. Unfortunately, there are still some veterinarians that rely on declawing procedures as a source of revenue, despite the known short- and long-term health and behavioral risks.

*“(b) Anesthesia is administered to the animal during the procedure;”*

Anesthesia is a must for any surgical procedure, especially when it involves amputation of any body part. This statement implies that administering anesthesia to pets undergoing declawing will be free of pain and distress. While this may be true during the procedure itself, the pain during recovery from this procedure can be excruciating, and anesthesia will not address the long-term painful complications (nail regrowth under the skin, leading to infection, pain, and swelling) experienced by many cats years after being declawed.

*“(c) The procedure is performed because:*

*“(B) Attempts to prevent the animal from destructively using its claws have failed; or*

The language pertaining to preventing an animal from destructively using its claws is vague and wholly undefined. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats, and there is a multitude of ways to redirect or prevent scratching of unwanted objects (scratching posts, nail trims, nail cover applications, etc). It has been my experience that some vets are unable or unwilling to counsel owners about scratching behaviors and

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declaw alternatives. For the cat patients of these vets, what “attempts” will realistically be made before suggesting the inhumane declaw procedure?

These exceptions could easily allow a cat to be declawed for scratching furniture, carpeting, or other items in the rented living space, effectively giving the landlord the right to cite this bill as a reason to make a tenant declaw their cat(s).

*“(C) The animal’s destructive use of its claws presents a serious health risk to the animal or its owner;”*

If the use of claws by a cat presents a serious risk to the owner, the solution is NOT to declaw the cat. Cats that are declawed are much more likely to bite than cats that are still able to use their claws as their first defense when threatened. If a cat has injured its owner by scratching, imagine those same cats biting their owners, instead. Cat bites are a much more serious medical threat to humans, and declawing in many cases only increases the risk of disease transmission for immunocompromised individuals.

Although I do believe this bill, in its unamended form, was introduced to reduce or ban the cruel procedures of declawing and devocalization, it may actually achieve the opposite effect if passed with the harmful exemptions currently included. The only reason for a cat to be declawed or a dog to be devocalized is if “(A) The procedure is medically necessary to treat or relieve an illness, disease or injury or to correct a congenital abnormality that is causing or will cause the animal physical harm or pain.”

Please take a moment to read through the statements above, before deciding upon your vote for this bill. As a practicing veterinarian, I have seen the short-term pain and long-term complications that can happen with declawing procedures. Many cats end up in shelters after being declawed, due to behavioral aggression, biting, and litter box aversion leading to house soiling. I believe this cruel procedure should be banned altogether, through a bill that does not include exceptions that would still allow for cats to be declawed so easily. If this bill is passed in The Senate, it could set up a very harmful legal precedent, through which many more cats can be subjected to this act of cruelty, via the “exceptions” contained within the amendments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me at any time for more information. I would be happy to talk with you or your staff members regarding this very important issue.

Sincerely,  
Ashley

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