



Use Your Voice to Protect Theirs<sup>SM</sup>

## United Against Devocalization

A campaign of Coalition to Protect and Rescue Pets

### Position on Canine/Feline Devocalization ("Bark Softening," "Voice Reduction")

United Against Devocalization is a coalition of concerned veterinarians, animal shelters, animal behavior specialists, animal control officers and pet owners under the leadership of Coalition to Protect and Rescue Pets, a grassroots advocacy organization and national expert on the devocalization issue.

We are united in opposition to elective voice-altering surgery on dogs and cats. This procedure is commonly known as devocalization and by euphemisms devised to trivialize it, such as "bark softening," "voice reduction" and "bark (or voice) quieting."

Our position is simple and unwavering:

**The act of cutting, abrading or otherwise altering a dog's or cat's vocal apparatus by anyone, using any means, for any reason except to treat a *physical* ailment causing the animal medical harm is animal cruelty that the state must not allow.**

Animals vocalize persistently for a reason, typically to express an unmet need, such as for exercise or companionship, or to communicate distress. All animals tend to vocalize more in groups, and the voices of many are *always* louder than one or two. While some breeds of dogs and cats are innately more vocal than others, to breed or purchase them only to cut their vocal cords for this genetic predisposition is the height of callous disregard for our "best friends."

**Responsible stewardship of dogs and cats is the solution in all cases. Cutting vocal cord tissue is an inhumane substitute that harms animals and also puts our communities at risk as explained on page 2.**

### Devocalization Exposes Dogs and Cats to Lifelong Misery or Agonizing Death Regardless of the Vet's Skill, the Surgical Route or the Instrument Used.



- **Animals face serious surgical risks**, such as blood loss and infection. In fact, the risk of infection is ***greater*** for devocalization than for other surgeries.
- **Long-term consequences may include impaired breathing and swallowing** as a result of scar tissue—a normal outcome of any surgery—that develops in the throat. Many devocalized animals also cough and gag persistently or suffer chronic throat inflammation.
- **Some die in terror, gasping for air as they choke on food**. Some succumb to heatstroke, a significant risk even in moderate weather. That's because scarring in the throat impedes the animal from panting sufficiently to cool himself.
- **Animals also risk inhaling vomit, food or water into their lungs** due to inability of the larynx to close properly after devocalization. This may lead to fatal pneumonia.

## Devocalizing Animals Puts People at Risk Too.

- **Devocalization reduces or eliminates the vocal nuances that tell people whether the animal wants to play or is about to attack.** Animal behavior experts say humans are *not* adept at reading animal body language; they need audible, distinct vocal cues, especially when the animal is not their own. A senior in the park bending over to pet a devocalized dog can't possibly know its muffled, nondescript sounds mean "leave me alone or I'll bite."

*Few realize a wagging tail may mean a dog is feeling threatened, not friendly.*

- **Devocalized animals have been sold without disclosure, which can cause the new owner great hardship.** Life-saving surgery to remove scar tissue that forms over the airway, a common complication of devocalization, is very expensive, typically \$2,000 or more. Unsuspecting pet owners who buy or adopt these medically compromised animals may face a devastating choice they did not anticipate: euthanasia of a beloved pet or a significant financial burden.

*Tragically, owners may inadvertently hasten their pet's death because they don't realize special precautions may be necessary: Many devocalized animals are at increased risk for choking on their food or suffering heatstroke at play, even when it's not hot.*

## Devocalization Burdens Municipalities.

- **Cutting vocal cords doesn't teach an animal to obey—or an owner to provide the responsible care and supervision necessary to manage all behavior.** Even devocalized animals may bite, soil public property, jump on children and frail elders, or run into the street. There are no surgeries to correct those behaviors. Responsible training, care and supervision are necessary to manage behavior, including vocalization.
- **Devocalization may lead to biting and other destructive behaviors.** The most common reasons for persistent vocalization are loneliness, boredom, fear or other discomfort. Cutting vocal cords doesn't change this distress; it just makes it easier for the owner to ignore. Not only is that inhumane, it is dangerous: The animal whose needs continue to be unmet has little choice but to express his frustration by escalating to biting or other destructive behavior.

*What's more dangerous than an agitated animal who can't unambiguously and audibly vocalize a warning to stay away?*

- **Devocalization lets hoarders and illegal breeding enterprises go undetected.** And keeping many animals in an apartment or other residential setting compromises neighbors; breeding without oversight compromises animals and those who purchase them.
- **Devocalization can increase the risk of surrender or abandonment, burdening taxpayer-funded municipal pounds and financially strapped nonprofit shelters.**

Biting, house-soiling and the owner's financial concerns are among the top ten reasons for surrender; barking and meowing are **not**. Devocalization can increase the risk of destructive behaviors because it enables owners to ignore their animal's unmet needs, giving the animal little choice but to act out in other ways.

In addition, some animals are surrendered, abandoned or euthanized when the owner cannot pay for costly surgery to remove scar tissue blocking their pet's airway, a common complication of devocalization.

## DESTRUCTIVE PROVISIONS

Those with a financial interest in devocalization (“bark softening,” “voice reduction” and other sanitizing euphemisms) advance provisions to allow and legitimize surgery that concerned vets and other animal care and rescue professionals rightly deem an act of animal cruelty. Here are some:

1) **“Allowable if Behavior Modification Fails” serves only to keep devocalization legal.** A variation on this proposal, “allowable as a final alternative to euthanasia,” is equally unenforceable and is emotionally manipulative. **No** vet is forced to devocalize **or** euthanize a healthy animal. And reputable shelters—many now are “no-kill”—work with animals to correct behavior problems.

► **This provision is unenforceable.**

- **Vets can’t know—some won’t ask—if a client provides responsible care as well as training.** Animals who don’t receive the companionship, exercise and mental stimulation they require express their frustration vocally. Cutting vocal cords doesn’t address the animal’s needs; it just allows the owner to ignore them, giving the animal little choice but to act out in far more harmful ways.
- **Even receipts for training don’t mean the advice was followed.** Training takes time, effort and consistency. Having an animal’s voice surgically altered is easy for lazy owners, profitable for vets. Only the animal suffers.
- **Some breeds, like Siamese cats and Sheltie dogs, are more vocal than others. This loophole allows their vocal cords to be cut for the benefit of irresponsible people** who buy, breed or adopt “talkative” animals despite this genetic predisposition, only to subject them to painful, risky elective surgery for it.



► **This provision is baseless.**

- **Owners have many humane, effective non-surgical options** for managing vocalization. For those who don’t wish to commit the time and effort, shelters and concerned vets recommend rehoming as the ethical solution.
- **Even anxiety-triggered vocalization can be managed humanely** with medication, under professional supervision, that facilitates behavior modification.
- **Devocalized animals are euthanized, surrendered and abandoned despite—some because of—their surgically altered voice.** Nearly all the devocalized animals United Against Devocalization has discovered over the past seven years were surrendered **after** their vocal cords were cut. Some were euthanized by owners who no longer wanted them or couldn’t afford expensive reparative surgery. Others died from consequences of devocalization, such as choking.

► **This provision legitimizes and encourages devocalization** by codifying elective voice-altering surgery, an act of animal cruelty, as an acceptable practice. Lifting the stigma will expose even more dogs and cats to this dangerous surgery they don’t need but are helpless to refuse. ***A law with this loophole is WORSE than having no law.***

► **This provision DISCOURAGES RESPONSIBLE pet ownership and breeding, including:** selection of a pet appropriate for one’s living environment and lifestyle; proper care and supervision; correct, consistent training; medication-facilitated behavior modification under the guidance of a veterinary behaviorist; and **not** breeding or domiciling animals where their collective voices will bother neighbors.

***Access to voice-altering surgery relieves pet owners and breeders of these responsibilities with a quick fix that doesn’t fix the underlying issue, only masks it. That can lead to more serious problems that put people at risk—and for which healthy animals are surrendered and euthanized.***

2) **"Allowable for Medical Necessity" is a loophole UNLESS defined as: "to treat a PHYSICAL ailment causing the animal medical harm or pain."** An allowance that simply says "medically necessary" or "medically beneficial" is open to interpretation, enabling vets to perform non-therapeutic, voice-altering surgery without any restriction.

3) **Omission of the word "physical" to qualify the conditions under which devocalization is legal is a loophole.** It allows vets to perform this risky, nontherapeutic surgery for *any* reason, including claimed "behavioral illness." That is absurd:

- **Barking and meowing are *not* pathology. They only become problematic when an owner:** ignores the animal's needs (such as for exercise and companionship); keeps too many animals; inadvertently rewards and reinforces barking/meowing; doesn't train the animal correctly, consistently or at all.
- **Even anxiety can be managed humanely** with medication-facilitated behavior modification under professional supervision.

4) **Substituting "pet" or "companion animal" for "dogs and cats" is a very sly loophole.** Animals used for breeding, show, sport or testing by research laboratories—devocalized so they'll be quiet in kennels or the show ring—are not considered pets. They would be left without any protection. And their next owner, typically an adopter, would be left to deal with the costly, sometimes fatal, medical consequences of voice-altering surgery.



5) **Banning devocalization but allowing "bark softening" or other sanitizing euphemism is a loophole: They're the same thing.** Those with a financial interest in devocalization falsely claim "bark softening"—also spun as "voice reduction"—is a more benign, "non-invasive" procedure. Here's the truth:

- **The soft tissue of the vocal apparatus must be cut in order to alter the voice.** That is invasive and dangerous regardless of the amount of tissue cut or the surgical route, through the oral cavity or an incision in the neck.
- **Whenever soft tissue is cut or abraded, even with laser, scarring may occur.** When it develops in the throat, it can be deadly.
- **Scar tissue in the throat can block the airway,** resulting in the impaired breathing and swallowing that cause lifelong anguish or premature death. Persistent coughing and gagging, and chronic throat inflammation, are among the other miseries devocalized animals endure.
- **Damage to the larynx as a result of voice-altering surgery** can cause the animal to inhale food, liquids, even vomit into his or her lungs. That isn't just frightening and painful. It can also result in potentially fatal aspiration pneumonia.

6) **Applying the law only to breeders is unenforceable and worse.** Under this proposal, only breeders would not be allowed to have their animals devocalized.

- **There is no certain way to identify breeders who wish to skirt the law** by claiming they're "just" pet owners—breeders aren't licensed.
- **This loophole encourages devocalization** by codifying it as an acceptable option for pet owners. That would cause even more dogs and cats to be devocalized. It's quick and easy for those who enjoy a dog's or cat's companionship but don't want to commit to responsible stewardship of their animals. And it's profitable for the vet.

***Who suffers? Only the animal and future owners, who may be forced to choose between a costly procedure to remove scar tissue from their beloved pet's airway—a common outcome of devocalization—and euthanasia.***



**United Against Devocalization is a campaign of  
Coalition to Protect and Rescue Pets**

**Information About Devocalization**

[www.stopdevocalizing.weebly.com](http://www.stopdevocalizing.weebly.com)

**Hearing is Believing!**

What do devocalized animals really sound like?

<http://stopdevocalizing.weebly.com/videos>

**Contact Us**

[CPRPets@aol.com](mailto:CPRPets@aol.com)

[stopdevocalizing@aol.com](mailto:stopdevocalizing@aol.com)