

Dear Senators of Committee on Human Services & Early Childhood,

June 1st, 2015

I am unable to attend the public hearing for HB 3494-A on June 1st, 2015, as I am working. I am writing to you regarding HB 3494-A.

HB 3494-A is titled "Prohibits declawing or devocalizing of animal unless procedure is performed by licensed veterinarian under certain conditions."

Three very objectionable provisions/"certain conditions" of HB 3494-A are:

- 1) Declawing and devocalization are "allowable if behavior modification fails, or allowed "as a last resort." Devocalization (cutting of the vocal cords) exposes animals to lifelong misery, risk of horrific death from choking or inhalation of food and liquids into the lungs. There is credible evidence that declawing causes behavioral problems that often land the cat in a shelter (biting and house-soiling). Declawing is illegal in many countries. Since becoming illegal in 8 cities in California, there has been NO increase in the number of animals removed from homes and put in shelters. This provision only promotes irresponsible pet ownership and breeding.
- 2) Declawing is allowed to "protect human health" or "allowable if the animal's claws present a danger to the owner's health." The **Center for Disease Control**, the **National Institute of Health**, the **Infectious Disease Society of America** and the **US Public Health Services** have published statements that declawing of cats "is **NOT** recommended", even in cases with HIV positive owners. Claw caps are among many ways to protect the owner without harming the animal. If someone is worried about his/her health, then why do they own a cat or dog?! Cats have been reported to bite more after being declawed, since their first line of defense has been taken away. Bites can be much more dangerous and prone to infection, than a scratch.
- 3) "Allowable to treat an emotional issue." The **ONLY** ethical reason to cut vocal cords or toes is to treat a **PHYSICAL** ailment- a law that omits the word "physical" allows vets to declaw or devocalize for any reason, including "behavioral illness"! Barking/meowing and scratching are **NOT** pathological- they are normal behaviors that can become problematic when an owner ignores the animal's needs. Anxiety- triggered vocalization can be managed with medications. Cutting vocal cords increases distress and as the animal becomes more desperate, it can become more destructive.

I have personal experience with working as a volunteer at a shelter where cats were routinely declawed, hoping to improve their chances of adoption. The results were quite the opposite- after these particular cats were declawed, they had more aggressive behavior, urinated outside their litter box, and would bite more frequently. A friend of mine adopted a dog who was "devocalized" as a 6 month old puppy, and this dog suffered his entire life with choking every time he ate. My mother has a paralyzed vocal cord from extensive neck surgery for cancer, and she cannot project her voice, and chokes easily when eating or drinking, which continues 20 years after her initial surgery.

This bill is not a "ban" on declawing, but an avenue that would actually legitimize the unnecessary practice of declawing. Instead of a real, humane law prohibiting surgery on animal's vocal cords and amputation to the last knuckle, HB 3494 allows devocalization and declawing for reasons ranging from the owner's health to the owner's failure to manage his/her animal's behavior. All of these exemptions are unenforceable and baseless!

If passed, this bad bill will be used as a model bill for other states. The Paw Project has sponsored the only successful legislation in North America that prohibits declawing- and they have worked for over 15 years trying to educate vets and the public.

The harmful repercussions of HB 3494-A maybe irreparable!

Please oppose HB 3494-A unless it is amended to remove "all non-therapeutic exceptions."

The goal can be achieved without permanently damaging our pets and causing life-long suffering.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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