

NJVMA Opposes Bill To Ban Cat Declaw

On Thursday, February 16, the New Jersey Senate Economic Growth Committee advanced legislation that would prohibit surgically declawing cats and other animals. In written testimony to the committee, NJVMA opposed the legislation on several fronts. NJVMA's opposition included the following points:

- A surgical declaw is a legal surgical procedure that should be used as an alternative to euthanasia or abandonment when the health of the owner is at risk or an owner has exhausted all alternatives to keep the pet in the household.
- The decision about what is best for pets should be between the licensed veterinarian and the client and should not be regulated by government.
- The NJVMA is NOT pro-declaw, but is anti-euthanasia. NJVMA wants to promote keeping cats in loving households and not having them euthanized or relinquished to shelters where they are more likely to be euthanized.

The bill, **S1803**, would prohibit a person from performing a declawing procedure by any means on a cat or other animal. The procedure could be necessary by a licensed veterinarian if a medical procedure is needed to take place, such as removing a cancerous tumor.

NJVMA's testimony against the legislation also included survey data that showed declaw procedures do not constitute a large portion of surgical procedures for veterinarians in the state, with the average being fewer than nine declaw procedures each year.

The Association's statement also pointed out that many who want declawing banned assert that declawed cats are given to shelters for elimination issues, and that the elimination issues are directly related to the declaw. There is no statistical evidence to validate that claim. Most cats with elimination issues are caused by too few boxes in the house, stress between high numbers of cats in the home, lack of appropriate cleaning, or the wrong litter/litterbox. Also, these cats may have medical issues such as feline urinary tract disease, kidney disease or diabetes that owners have declined pursuing. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of all cats relinquished to shelters are ultimately euthanized.

Proponents of the ban on declawing also state that cats relinquished to shelters exhibit higher levels of aggression or elimination disorders. However, peer-reviewed studies addressing risks of relinquishment to shelters do not support that claim and state there is no observable difference in aggression or elimination disorders between declawed and clawed cats.

NJVMA also pointed out that studies being cited by anti-declaw groups are based on old outdated pain protocols. With the current use of multimodal pain relief (opioid medications, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, nerve blocks, etc.) there is excellent pain control in place. Related, the vast majority of cats that have been declawed have high quality of life without pain or side effects of the surgery.

The number of feline patients in veterinary practices has increased in recent years, but the number of declaw procedures has decreased, showing that veterinarians are educating clients on alternatives to declawing. As a result, there is no need for legislation to ban this procedure.

Finally, NJVMA also pointed out that declawing a cat is not the only surgical procedure performed to make a cat more livable in a household under certain circumstances. For example, an indoor male cat is neutered to make the cat more acceptable in that indoor environment. They are not neutered because they are prone to

testicular tumors or prostate issues, they are neutered so they do not have tomcat-scented urine and so they do not spray urine.

The legislation includes the requirement that any person who violates the provision would be guilty of a disorderly person's offense, punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000, a term of imprisonment of up to six months, or both. A violator would also be subject to a civil penalty of between \$500 and \$2,000.

Under the bill, when a licensed veterinarian determines that declawing is necessary for therapeutic purposes, the vet would be required to file a written statement with the Department of Health and provide a copy to the animal's owner or keeper. A veterinarian who fails to comply would be subject to disciplinary action by the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners.