

(Delivered by email)

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Michael J. Webert
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources – Agriculture
Subcommittee
Virginia House of Delegates
House Room 3
Richmond, VA 23218

RE: IN SUPPORT OF HB 1382 (Gooditis) – Declawing Cats

Dear Chair Webert:

As a representative of Alley Cat Allies, with our more than 40,000 supporters in Virginia, I am writing to express **my strong support for HB 1382 - Declawing Cats; civil penalty**, and I urge legislators to please support this bill. If enacted into law, this bill will prohibit the declawing of cats, a cruel and painful procedure which involves severing a cat's toes at the knuckle.

Alley Cat Allies was first established in 1990 and is the leader of the global movement to protect the lives of cats and kittens. We work with lawmakers, shelters, and the public toward lifesaving laws and policies that serve the best interests of cats.

Also known as onychectomy, declawing is the surgical amputation of a cats' toes. It is almost always done for nontherapeutic purposes. A common but misguided motivation for declawing is to prevent cats from scratching furniture.¹ Many opponents to declawing bans claim that owners, frustrated by cats scratching, could relinquish their cats to shelters if this procedure is no longer allowed.²

This has not proven to be the case. After the City of Los Angeles banned declawing in 2009, the number of cats being relinquished to shelters *decreased* by 43 percent.³ Similarly, a peer-reviewed study on the impact from British Columbia's 2018 ban on declawing concluded that "legislation banning elective onychectomy does not increase the risk of feline shelter relinquishment – for destructive behavior or overall – and is unlikely to have a significant effect on shelter euthanasia or length of stay."⁴

Conversely, declawing itself can cause behaviors that are among the top reasons people give or relinquish cats to shelters. A declawed cat is more likely to exhibit increased aggression and biting to compensate for losing her protective claws, her first line of defense. Declawing also leads to chronic pain, arthritis, balance issues, and back problems. The residual pain associated with declawing also can result in litter box avoidance.

¹ The Paw Project, *Frequently Asked Questions About Feline Declawing*, <http://www.pawproject.org/faqs/>

² Christine Hauser, *Cat Declawing Ban in Denver Would Be a First Outside California*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 25, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/25/us/denver-cats-claws.html>.

³ Brenda Barmette, general manager of Los Angeles Animal Services Department, February 2021.

⁴ Ellis et al., "Effect of a provincial feline onychectomy ban on cat intake and euthanasia in a British Columbia animal shelter system," *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, September, 2021

Thanks to years of humane education and outreach by Alley Cat Allies and The Paw Project, Americans increasingly realize how detrimental declawing can be to a cat's wellbeing. More have come to learn that declawing is a non-therapeutic and unnecessary surgery.

We invite animals into our homes as companions and family members. Having cats means caring for them, providing for them, and using humane solutions to solve behavioral issues. Claws are an extremely important part of a cat's anatomy and life. We do not remove a puppy's teeth to prevent him from chewing on shoes. Instead, understanding this is a behavioral need in response to teething, we provide the puppy with appropriate toys that allow him to carry out his instinctive desire to chew and minimize the discomfort. Similarly, we should not surgically remove a cat's toes and permanently alter her health and wellbeing when humane behavior modifications are available and affordable.⁵ Scratching posts, deterrents, regular trimming, nail caps and plenty of toys help to redirect this natural and necessary instinct.

Declawing bans are becoming the law in more locations. New York state enacted a ban in 2019, Maryland followed in 2022, and 13 major cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver and Pittsburgh, and at least 42 countries, including Switzerland, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have outlawed the declawing of cats. Virginia will be at the forefront of this movement to ensure that cats will no longer be forced to undergo this inhumane and painful procedure.

I respectfully request you and the members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources to support HB 1382 and keep cats' claws on their paws.

Sincerely,



Alice Burton
Director of Programs, Alley Cat Allies

cc: Members, House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources – Agriculture Subcommittee

The Honorable C. Matthew Fariss
The Honorable Wendy W. Gooditis
The Honorable Dan Helmer
The Honorable Robert D. Orrock
The Honorable Chris Runion
The Honorable Shelly Simonds
The Honorable Rodney Willett
The Honorable Tony O. Wilt
The Honorable Thomas C. Wright
The Honorable R. Lee Ware

⁵ <https://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/cat-behavior-scratching/>, Rubbing or spraying scratching posts with catnip, trimming their claws, nail caps (vinyl nail covers that can be applied by a veterinarian, groomer, or at home), or spraying the cat's target scratching area with a homemade or commercial deterrent.

