



**Testimony in Support of HB 1382
Prohibiting the declawing of cats**

**House Agriculture Subcommittee
January 18, 2023**

The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization, supports passage of HB 1382, which would end the practice of nontherapeutic declawing of cats in the state. Declawing has serious implications for feline welfare and the bond between people and their cats. If passed, Virginia would join a rapidly growing number of communities taking a stand against this inhumane practice.

Convenience declawing of cats is already illegal in New York State, Maryland and the District of Columbia. It is banned in eight California cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, the city and county of Denver, Colorado and the city and county of St. Louis, Missouri. In Austin, Texas, Pittsburgh and Allentown, Pennsylvania, Madison, Wisconsin and Volusia County, Florida. Nine out of ten Canadian provinces prohibit non-therapeutic declawing.

Nontherapeutic declawing is banned or considered an unethical veterinary practice in a vast number of countries, from New Zealand to Brazil to the United Kingdom. The European Convention on the Protection of Pet Animals prohibits the procedure throughout the European Union.

The veterinary community is increasingly opposed to declawing. The American Association of Feline Practitioners, the American Animal Hospital Association, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association are opposed. The major veterinary hospital chains, VCA, Banfield, and Blue Pearl, do not offer elective declaw procedures on cats. Many U.S. veterinary schools no longer routinely teach declaw procedures.

However, we can't continue to wait for the veterinary profession to end declawing on its own. These amputations are still too commonly practiced, and cat owners are often not made aware of the high risk of permanent adverse effects on cats or of the procedures' controversies – that many veterinarians won't amputate a cat's toes unless there is a valid medical need.

There are no valid reasons to declaw a cat.

Arguments in favor of declawing often center around the desire to prevent unwanted scratching of either furniture or people. Amputation is an extreme response to what can be addressed with regular nail trimming, a variety of scratching posts and a better understanding of feline behavior. Moreover, declawed cats are at a greater risk of developing more serious adverse behaviors after amputation, such as litter box aversion or an increase in biting and aggression, than the ones the amputations were meant to prevent.

In pain, and no longer able to defend themselves with their claws, cats may resort to biting. The documented increased biting behavior of declawed cats can lead to more severe disease in people than cat scratches. Cat bites carry a dangerously high infection risk to healthy and immunocompromised people alike. Infectious disease specialists do not recommend declawing. The National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Infectious Diseases Society of America jointly stated that declawing is "not advised" to protect the health of even severely immune-compromised patients.



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats.

Declawing is not done for the benefit of the cat as it prevents the cat from performing natural behaviors. The act of scratching removes the dead husks from their claws, marks territory, both visually and with scent glands in their paws, and stretches their muscles. Scratching is important for a cat's physical and mental wellbeing. In appropriate scratching can be managed with training and a better understanding of cat behavior. What is natural behavior for a cat often is considered misbehavior by humans, especially when furniture or other household objects are damaged in the process. While veterinarians can counsel their clients, veterinary behaviorists and certified cat behavior consultants can be employed for more difficult cases, as declawing should never be considered a "last resort."

Declaw bans do not lead to more cats being surrendered to animal shelters – in fact, they may help keep cats in their homes.

There is a false narrative that a cat owner unable to get their cat declawed is likely to relinquish that cat to an animal shelter or abandon that cat outdoors. The risk of a cat ending up homeless or worse, euthanized, due to a declaw prohibition is grossly overestimated. A recent study of data from British Columbia shelters covering the three years prior to and three years after a province-wide declaw ban went into effect showed that there was no increase in cats being relinquished or euthanized. The number of owner-surrender cats actually decreased after the ban. Publicly available data from Los Angeles and other California cities at the forefront of enacting declaw bans also show no increase in cat intake at shelters citywide once declawing was prohibited.

The reality is that due to the higher prevalence of long-term adverse impacts of multiple amputations, declawing puts cats at a greater risk of eviction from their homes and relinquishment to shelters and rescue organizations. According to a study published in the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association, among relinquished cats, 52.4% of declawed cats were reported to exhibit litter box avoidance, compared to 29.1% of non-declawed cats.

Declawing is no good for cats or people. It's time to end the practice.

On behalf of our members and supporters in Virginia, the HSUS asks for your favorable vote on HB 1382, a humane bill which will protect the health and well-being of family pets.